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The Waffen-SS (4)

24. to 38. Divisions, & Volunteer Legions

ordon Williamson • Illustrated by Stephen Andrew

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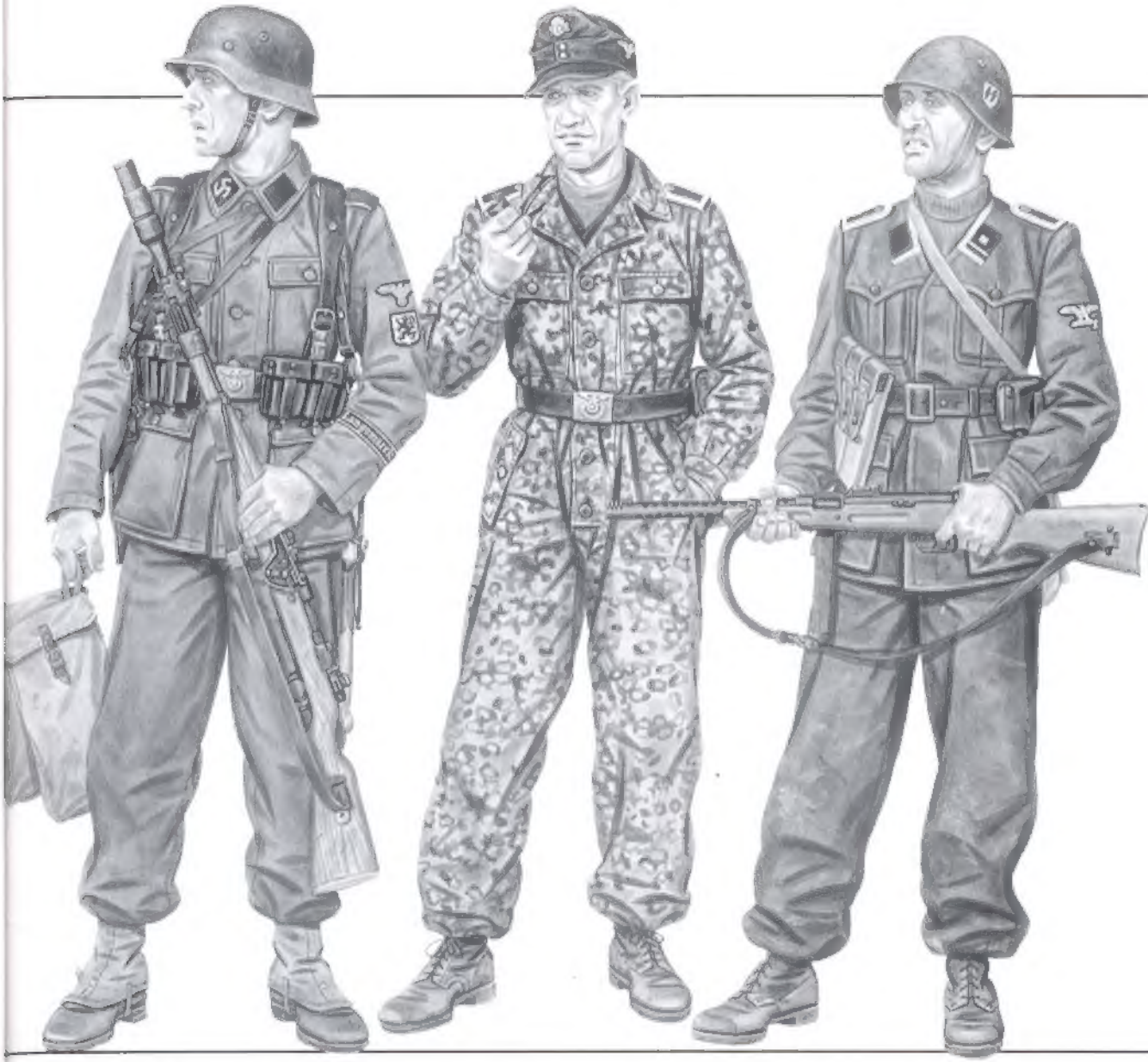

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Editor's Note

The historical background of the military units of the SS – the German Nazi Party's political security organisation – is summarized in the first title in this sequence, MAA 401, *The Waffen-SS (1): 1. to 5. Divisions*, together with the records of the premier divisions. Those covered in MAA 404 & 415, *...(2) 6. to 10. Divisions*, & *...(3) 11. to 23. Divisions*, were raised between 1941 and 1943.
General explanations of Waffen-SS **rank structure and titles**, and of universal **uniform and insignia practice**, will be found in MAA 401, and are not repeated here.
Regarding the lists of **commanders** which head each chapter, a division was normally a command for a major-general (SS-Brigadeführer, abbrev. SS-Brigaf) or lieutenant-general (SS-Gruppenführer, SS-Gruf). Occasionally, when a formation was understrength or had been reduced to a mere 'battlegroup', command was held by a brigadier (SS-Oberführer, SS-Oberf), a colonel (SS-Standartenführer, SS-Staf) or even a lieutenant-colonel (SS-Obersturmbannführer, SS-Ostubaf).
The listings of **principal elements** of each division are abridged, including only main combat units – in the order infantry, infantry reconnaissance (Fusilier), tank/armoured assault gun, anti-tank, artillery, anti-aircraft, motorized reconnaissance, and engineer. All divisions included a range of additional support and service units, almost invariably identified by the divisional number.
Units often bore several successive numbers and titles, sometimes over short periods and only patchily documented. For more detailed analysis than space allows here, readers are directed to such reference works as Bender & Taylor, *Uniforms, Organization & History of the Waffen-SS*, Vols 1–5 (Mountain View, California, 1969–82); and to the website *http://www.wssob.com* for more up-to-date notes on the higher numbered formations.
After Oct 1943 **infantry regimental numbering** was rationalized throughout the W-SS, with sequential numbers irrespective of exact designation as Mountain Rifles, Grenadiers, etc: e.g. the infantry units of 24. Waffen Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Div der SS were numbered as W Gebjr Regts der SS 59 & 60, and those of 25. W Gren Div der SS *Hunyadi* as W Gren Regts der SS 61, 62 & 63, and so on.

Finally, it is a matter of record that the Waffen-SS as a whole earned a dual reputation: in some cases, for remarkable aggression and stamina in combat, and in others, for murderous atrocity against civilians and prisoners. As throughout these Men-at-Arms titles, this book is concerned solely with brief, factual organization and campaign histories of the separate formations, and the evolving uniforms, insignia and equipment of their personnel.

Artist's Note

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All enquiries should be addressed to:

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The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter.

THE WAFFEN-SS (4)
24. to 38. DIVISIONS

INTRODUCTION

BY 1944, WHEN THE UNITS AND FORMATIONS covered in this text began to appear in the Waffen-SS order of battle, the relaxation of the original standards demanded of recruits to this most elitist of the German armed services was complete.

The determination of the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler, to expand the military arm of his empire had led, in 1939–41, to the transfer of German SS-Totenkopfstandarte security guard units into SS-Divisions for front line service (with mixed results), and into the SS-Brigades of his personal anti-partisan command operating behind the lines in Russia – the Kommandostab RF-SS. This was paralleled by the recruitment in 1940–42 of non-Germans of acceptably 'Germanic' racial origin: at first Western European, Scandinavian and Baltic volunteers, and later ethnic Germans or 'Volksdeutsche' from occupied or allied Eastern states (principally the Balkans and Hungary). Their ethnic difference from the original 'Reichsdeutsche' divisions was signalled by their assembly into SS-Freiwilligen or 'Volunteer' divisions – a title that was less than accurate in many cases.

In the face of huge losses on the Eastern Front, and the need to police the vast territories occupied in the East and Balkans, in 1943 Himmler and his recruitment chief, SS-Ogruf Gottlob Berger, finally abandoned Nazi racial obsessions and accepted Slavs and even Balkan Muslims as cannon-fodder, in what were eventually titled Waffen Divisionen der SS ('Armed Divisions of the SS').

The crises of 1944–45 would see actual or nominal 'divisions' formed from an increasingly motley range of manpower sources. The best of these were the survivors of the Western European volunteer regiments or 'legions', now used as the nuclei for expanded brigades and finally divisions, bulked out with men from various other sources including Volksdeutsche conscripts. The drive to gather up ethnic Germans and collaborationist foreigners, to form several new divisions, would become ever less discriminating. Drafts of bewildered German airmen and sailors for whom there were no longer aircraft, ships or fuel might find themselves transferred at the stroke of a pen into the Waffen-SS, and thrust into gaps in the Russian Front after the sketchiest preparation.

Léon Degrelle, at this date a subaltern in the Belgian Assault Brigade *Wallonien*, talking to an SS war correspondent some time in summer 1943. The Army pattern Edelweiss sleeve patch was acquired by the Walloon volunteer regiment before its transfer to the Waffen-SS in June 1943. The journalist, with a private's plain black patch on the dark green collar of his M1936-style tunic, is identified by the cuff title 'SS-Kriegsberichter'. (Josef Charita)

Training school and depot personnel would be assembled around worn-down battlegroups into 'paper' SS divisions with minimal armament and transport. The retreating front line caught up with sinister 'anti-partisan' gangs of German criminals and foreign renegades redesignated as combat divisions, who sometimes met a richly deserved fate at the hands of the avenging Red Army.

Units quoted from fragmentary official documents as components of late-war formations may never actually have been formed, or may have served dispersed without ever being assembled under effective divisional command. The battlefield value of these units was wildly uneven; but, remarkably, a few of them fought on stubbornly amid the ruins until the very last hours of the Third Reich.

SS-Untersturmführer Gunther Knoll, serving on the staff of V SS Volunteer Mountain Corps (the edge of the SS mountain troops' Edelweiss is just visible on his right sleeve). A corps command had a varying order-of-battle: units assigned as 'corps troops' under direct command tended to be attached for longer periods, but the various component divisions were often transferred from one corps to another at short intervals. V SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgs Armeekorps was formed in Yugoslavia under SS-Ogruf Artur Phleps in July 1943, initially as the higher command for 7. SS-Div *Prinz Eugen* and the new 13. SS-Div *Handschar* plus Army units. The SS-Karstwehr Bataillon was listed among its corps units.

THE DIVISIONS: 24. WAFFEN GEBIRGS (KARSTJÄGER) DIVISION DER SS

Designations

1942	SS-Karstwehr Bataillon
September 1944	24. Waffen-Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Division der SS
December 1944	Waffen Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Brigade der SS

Commanders

Dec 1944 SS-Obersturmbannführer Karl Marx; *Dec 1944–Feb 1945* SS-Sturmbannführer Werner Hahn; *Feb–May 1945* SS-Oberführer Adolf Wagner

Principal elements

Waffen-Gebirgsjäger Regiment der SS 59; Waffen-Gebirgsjäger Regiment der SS 60; SS-Panzer Kompanie; Waffen-Gebirgs Artillerie Regiment der SS 24; SS-Gebirgs Pionier Kompanie 24

Campaigns

In June–August 1942 an SS-Karstwehr Kompanie was formed for anti-partisan duties in the high alpine terrain of the Karst – the mountainous border areas between Italy, Austria and Slovenia. In November it was ordered expanded to battalion strength, with just under 500 men. Spending the first half of 1943 training in Austria, it was committed to action after the Italian surrender that September, disarming Italian troops at Taravisio and protecting ethnic German communities around Camporosso and Boscaverde. Between October 1943 and June 1944, headquartered at Gradisca, it carried out anti-partisan actions in northern Italy around Trieste, Udine and the Istrian peninsula, and unit strength increased to just under 1,000 men. In July 1944, Himmler ordered it upgraded to a 'division' with an establishment of 6,600, under the supervision of the notorious SS-Gruf Odilo Globocnik, Higher SS & Police Leader for the Adriatic coastal region.'

A grainy but extremely rare photograph of the 'H' collar patch being worn, in the identity photo from the paybook of a Hungarian soldier from 25. W Gren Div der SS *Hunyadi*. (Gary Wood)

In August–November *Karstjäger* continued its anti-partisan operations in the same areas; but by December 1944 its strength had still only reached around 3,000 men, and the division was downgraded to brigade status. Early in 1945 it clashed with partisans supported by British troops in the Julian Alps. In the closing weeks of the war the brigade was attached to a Kampfgruppe under SS-Brigaf Heinz Harmel, former commander of the *Frundsberg* Division (see MAA 404, page 46), which successfully held open the Karawanken passes for German units retreating from the Balkans into Austria, so that they could make their surrender to British troops. On 9 May 1945, *Karstjäger* surrendered to the British 6th Armoured Division – it was one of the very last German units to lay down its arms.

Special insignia

A right hand collar patch was manufactured showing a stylised flower, but it is believed that no examples were ever issued or worn, and that personnel wore the SS-runes.

25. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS *HUNYADI* (ungarische Nr.1)

Designations

April 1944	25. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division
November 1944	25. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS *Hunyadi*[2] (ungarische Nr.1)

Commanders

Nov 1944 SS-Oberführer Thomas Müller; *Nov 1944–May 1945* Waffen-Gruppenführer Jozef Grassy

Principal elements

Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 61; Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 62; Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 63; Waffen Schi Bataillon der SS 25; Waffen Artillerie Regiment der SS 25

Campaigns

In October 1944 the Germans overthrew the Hungarian government of Adml Horthy, who had been planning a separate armistice with the USSR, and installed a compliant fascist regime under Ferenc Szalasi, leader of the Arrow Cross movement. Almost immediately the Hungarians were instructed to provide the manpower for two Waffen-SS

1 Himmler created the position of Höhere-SS und Polizeiführer (HSSPF), appointing a senior officer – usually an SS-Gruf or SS-Ogruf – in every military district (Wehrkreis) in Germany and in the occupied territories. They were effectively Himmler's personal representatives in the region, and on occasion had control of Waffen-SS as well as the usual police and security forces.

2 Janos Hunyadi (c1387–1456) was Captain-General of Hungary, and her greatest leader in the wars against the Turks in the 1440s–50s.

The collar patch of the 25. Div *Hunyadi*. Although it is likely that many of the division's soldiers wore either plain black collar patches or the SS-runes, there is clear photographic evidence for the wearing of this patch in both enlisted ranks' and cord-edged officers' formats.

divisions. The first began to form in November, from almost 17,000 Hungarian soldiers of the Honved 13th Div and including a ski battalion. By January 1945 over 20,000 men had been assembled at the Neuhammer training grounds in Germany, but were desperately short of weapons, vehicles and other supplies.

In February the Red Army was approaching Neuhammer; the division was rapidly evacuated, apart from a Kampfgruppe – this rearguard was annihilated. By April 1945 *Hunyadi* had withdrawn into Austria where, on 3 May, it was finally involved in serious (if brief) combat, against US Third Army forces. The Hungarians knocked out five Shermans but suffered heavy casualties, surrendering on 4–5 May near the Attersee.

Special insignia

A right hand collar patch featuring a large block letter 'H' was manufactured, and worn by members of this division. An armshield with the Hungarian colours was proposed, but it is uncertain if any were ever manufactured or issued.

26. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS (ungarische Nr.2)

Designation

27 Dec 1944–May 1945 — 26. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (ungarische Nr.2). Some sources state that the title *Hungaria* was awarded on 29 January 1945.

Commanders

Nov 1944–Jan 1945 SS-Standartenführer Rolf Tiemann, Waffen-Oberführer Zoltan Pisky, SS-Oberführer Laszlo Deak; *Jan–Mar 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Berthold Mack; *Mar–May 1945* Waffen-Gruppenführer Jozef Grassy

Principal elements (projected)

Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 64, 65 & 66; Waffen-Schi Bataillon der SS 26; SS-Panzer Bataillon 26

Campaigns

This division was authorised at the same time as *Hunyadi*, but by the end of 1944 only about 3,000 Hungarian troops had been taken on strength, with a further 5,000 civilian conscripts. By January 1945 the 'paper' numbers had risen to around 13,000, of whom some 10,000 conscripts were still without uniforms or weapons. The new division was to be equipped and trained at Sieddratz, Poland, where Hungarians came under sporadic attack by Polish partisans in mid-January while scavenging for food. On 14 January, barely a week after some heavy weapons were issued, these were confiscated by 9. Armee for use against the Soviet

winter offensive. The approach of the Red Army forced the division to retreat westwards to the Oder River, losing some 2,500 casualties along the way. In February 1945 the remainder joined their compatriots of the *Hunyadi* at the Neuhammer training grounds, but were forced to withdraw with them into Austria; this division also contributed men to the doomed rearguard. Men of the division surrendered to US troops at the Attersee on 3–5 May.

No **special insignia** were introduced for this division; some of those who received uniforms may have worn the SS-runes collar patch.

27. SS-FREIWILLIGEN GRENADIER DIVISION *LANGEMARCK*[3] (flamische Nr.1)

Designations

July 1941	SS-Freiwilligen Legion Flandern
May 1943	SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade *Langemarck*
October 1943	6. SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade *Langemarck*
October 1944	27. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division *Langemarck* (flamische Nr.1)

Commanders

Apr–July 1941 SS-Standartenführer Reich; *July 1941–Apr 1942* SS-Sturmbannführer Michael Lippert; *Apr–June 1942* SS-Standartenführer Hans-Albert von Lettow-Vorbeck; *June–July 1942* SS-Obersturmbannführer Fitzhum; *July 1942–May 1945* SS-Obersturmbannführer Konrad Schellong

A Hungarian sleeve shield with a black raven over the national colours of red/white/green. Although this is believed to have been manufactured during the war, no photographic evidence for its having been worn has yet emerged.

Principal elements, late 1944

SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 66; SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 67; SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 68

Campaigns

As described in MAA 415, the successful German invasions of Scandinavia and Western Europe in May–June 1940 were soon followed by recruitment of volunteer Waffen-SS 'legions' in the occupied Netherlands, Belgium and Scandinavia. In Belgium thriving nationalist movements – mainly the Rexists in French-speaking Wallonia, and the Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond in Flanders – had been sympathetic to Germany; and the Flemish-speaking element of the Belgian population were considered as racially 'Germanic'. In December 1940 a Dutch/Belgian Flemish regiment, entitled

3 In April 1942 a former SS-Totenkopf Standarte, SS-Inf Regt 4 of 2. SS-Inf Bde (mot.), was awarded this honour title, the name of a famous World War I battle in the Ypres Salient of Flanders. That June the unit was merged with the divisional motorcycle battalion of 2.SS-Div *Das Reich* to form an unnumbered infantry regiment of that name within the division. In 1943 this latter provided cadres, and the honour title, for the Flemish assault brigade.

SS-Hauptsturmführer Konrad Schellong, who would become commander of the *Langemarck* from July 1942 until the end of the war. Schellong was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 28 February 1945, when the remnant of this nominal division – actually of no more than brigade strength – were fighting desperately on the collapsing Oder front. Note that he wears the SS-runes collar patch rather than the *Trifos*.

Westland, became part of the new 5. SS-Division *Wiking* (see MAA 401); and in April 1941 a further Flemish-speaking volunteer regiment was formed under the title Freiwilligen Standarte Nordwest. After the German invasion of Russia in June 1941 the Dutch and Belgian-Flemish elements of this unit were separated into two new national regiments, the Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande and Frw Legion Flandern.

Despite the willingness of many Flemings to enlist, the Legion suffered from the same problems that were to dog many foreign SS units. There was a gulf between the propaganda of the recruiters and the actual conditions of service. The former stressed national identity, exaggerated the degree of independence that would be enjoyed, and at first made such promises as the retention of former Belgian Army ranks, and even that service would be limited to local policing duties. Once in uniform the recruits found these promises to be worthless; they were harshly treated by German officers and NCOs, and morale plunged. Himmler had to intervene personally to improve this culture; but in November 1941 the Legion, about 1,100 strong (of whom 14 officers and 950 men were Flemish), was judged combat ready and was sent to join the 2. SS-Inf Bde (mot.) in the Novgorod area of the northern Russian Front.

Between December 1941 and June 1942 the unit saw repeated heavy action around Volkhov – often in concert with the Spanish 'Blue Division' – and earned a good reputation, at a high cost in casualties.

Pulled out in June for brief rest and refitting at Heidelager and Milovice, Czechoslovakia, it returned to the Leningrad front in August, now under the command of Maj Konrad Schellong, transferred from the *Wiking* Division. For the rest of the year and into spring 1943 the unit was frequently in action alongside Dutch, Norwegian and Latvian volunteers, and despite successive batches of replacements it was worn away by combat attrition.

In April 1943 the survivors were withdrawn to Debica, Poland, and Milowice; and the following month the Legion was ordered expanded into the 2,200-strong SS Volunteer Assault Brigade *Langemarck*. Main units were two infantry battalions plus a Panzerjäger Kompanie, Sturmgeschütz Kompanie and Flak Kompanie. Posted back to the rear areas of the Eastern Front, it spent some six months working up before being declared combat ready in December 1943.

That month and the next the Sturmbrigade saw heavy fighting around Berdichev and Zhitomir, being reduced to about 400 men while covering the withdrawal of the 1. SS-Division *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*. In February 1944 the brigade was attached to a Kampfgruppe of the *Das Reich* Division, finally falling back after suffering up to 75 per cent losses. During April–July 1944 the brigade was rested and rebuilt in Poland and Bohemia. In the face of the great Soviet

summer offensive, Operation 'Bagration', a battlegroup from the brigade – Kampfgruppe Rehmann – was sent to the Narva front west of Leningrad. They fought on 25–29 July alongside the *Nederland* and *Wallonien* brigades and elements of the 11. SS-Division *Nordland* in the defence of Orphanage Hill, from which only 37 men of the unit survived unwounded, and where a young anti-tank gunner named Remi Schrijnen earned the Knight's Cross for sustained heroism. The survivors were evacuated by sea back to Germany.

At Soltau on 18 October 1944 the brigade was upgraded to divisional status, its roughly 3,000 men being reinforced with drafts from the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine, the Flemish Allgemeine-SS and Labour Service, the Vlaamse Waach militia, Flemish conscript workers, and others who had chosen to leave Belgium as the British liberation army rolled forward. Even with this additional manpower, however, *Langemarck* was well under strength. It had been planned that the division would take part in the December 1944 Ardennes offensive for propaganda purposes; but the advance had already begun to falter before they could be committed, and the division returned to the Eastern Front.

Remi Schrijnen, photographed in the rank of SS-Unterscharführer, was awarded the Knight's Cross on 21 September 1944 for gallantry while continuing to man his anti-tank gun single-handed after he had been wounded and his crewmates killed.

Flemish volunteers on parade, showing the distinctive *Trifos* collar patch of the *Langemarck* in the cord-edged officer's version. (Josef Charita)

A young Flemish SS-Sturmmann with the national arm shield – here a rather broad version – positioned between the sleeve eagle and rank chevron. (Josef Charita)

RIGHT **A soldier of the Sturmbrigade *Langemarck* on the Eastern Front, 1944. Apart from the *Trifos* collar patch, note that he still displays the SS-runes helmet decal, which was not applied to helmets at the factories after November 1943. (Josef Charita)**

By the end of January 1945 *Langemarck* was located around Stettin, and saw action at Stargard and Altdamm through February and March. Reduced to a battalion-strength battlegroup, it was forced back over the river Oder on 20 March, resting briefly around Schwedt and re-arming as tank-hunters. Between 3 and 10 May the remnants of the division surrendered to the British in Mecklenburg.

Special insignia

Collar patches

A right hand collar patch featuring a three-legged swastika known as the 'Trifos', originally designed for the Standarte Nordwest, was worn by men of the brigade and division.

Cuffbands

An initial design bearing the inscription *'Frw. Legion Flandern'* existed in machine-embroidered, machine-woven aluminium wire, and BeVo machine-woven formats.

A later cuffband with the title *'Langemarck'* was manufactured in machine-woven aluminium thread, machine-embroidered rayon, and in BeVo machine-weave. An early locally made Flemish version was rather crudely embroidered, the title spelt either as *Langemarck* or *Langenmarck* – both versions appear in wartime photographs.

Armshield

A 'heater' shield bearing the black rampant lion of Flanders on a yellow ground was worn on the left sleeve, normally just above the cuffband.

ABOVE **The *Trifos* collar patch, a three-legged version of the 'sunwheel' type swastika; and the Flanders national armshield of a black lion rampant on a golden-yellow field – the exact proportions varied.**

RIGHT **(Top) A rare BeVo machine-woven example of the cuffband for the *Freiwilligen Legion Flandern*, 1941–43; on the machine-embroidered version the abbreviation is 'Frw.' rather than 'Freiw.' (Below) 'Langemarck' cuffband in flat-wire woven, BeVo machine-woven, and machine-embroidered formats.**

28. SS-FREIWILLIGEN GRENADIER DIVISION *WALLONIEN*

Designations

Summer 1941	(Wallonische) Infanterie Bataillon 373
June 1943	SS-Sturmbrigade *Wallonien*
October 1943	5. SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade *Wallonien*
October 1944	28. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division *Wallonien*

Commanders

May 1942 Oberstleutnant Lucien Lippert; *June 1943* SS-Obersturmbannführer Lucien Lippert; *Feb 1944–May 1945* SS-Sturmbannführer Léon Degrelle

Principal elements

SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 69; SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 70; SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 71; SS-Panzerjäger Kompanie 28; plus Feb 1945, SS Freiwilligen Kompanie der SS 101 (spanische)

Campaigns

Unlike their Flemish fellow-countrymen, the Walloons of the French-speaking Belgian provinces were not at first considered sufficiently 'Germanic' for SS service. After the invasion of the USSR volunteers were accepted for the German Army, however; and the leader of the Walloon nationalist Christus Rex party, Léon Degrelle, successfully encouraged the formation of a volunteer battalion. Initially about 1,200 strong, the recruits left for Polish training camps in August 1942, and were soon designated (Wallonische) Infanterie Bataillon Nr.373

Although offered a commission in view of his leadership of the Rexist party, Degrelle chose to serve as a private soldier. After completing its training the unit was committed to anti-partisan duties in Poland in November 1941–February 1942; it was then attached to the 100. Jäger Division. By May 1942, Degrelle had risen through the NCO ranks, been commissioned Leutnant and awarded both classes of the Iron Cross.

After a brief period with the 68. Infanterie Division, the battalion joined the 97. Jäger Division on the southern sector of the Russian Front, seeing fierce combat along the River Don and later in the Caucasus during the deep advances of summer 1942; by December strength had been reduced to less than 200 men. However, Belgian replacements restored the unit to about 1,600 strong by May 1943; and the following month it was transferred from the Army to the Waffen-SS and expanded into an assault brigade.

In September 1943 the men of the SS-Sturmbrigade *Wallonien* were in action in the Dnieper Bend alongside the *Wiking* Division; and in November they were among the 56,000 troops cut off in the Cherkassy (Korsun) Pocket. Fighting was extremely intense, and the Walloons were reduced from about 2,000 to some 630 men by February 1944. The brigade played a leading part in the break-out of that month, but lost over a third of its remaining strength. The commander was among those killed, and SS-Stubaf Léon Degrelle – awarded the Knight's Cross on 20 February – appears to have replaced him at this date; he would continue to command until the end of the war.

After the briefest withdrawal to Germany, in April 1944 the rebuilt brigade was sent to help bolster the Narva front in the far north. The

ABOVE **SS-Sturmbannführer Degrelle with members of the Sturmbrigade *Wallonien* on the Eastern Front. The Knight's Cross with Oakleaves dates this photograph after 27 August 1944, when Hitler personally bestowed this decoration upon him – one of only two awards of the Oakleaves to foreign SS volunteers, the other being to the Estonian W-Staf Alfons Rebane of the 20. SS-Division. Under magnification the cuffband can be identified as Degrelle's unique hand-embroidered Gothic script example with the French language spelling 'Wallonie'. (Josef Charita)**

RIGHT **April 1944: one of the banners of the Sturmbrigade *Wallonien* is paraded through Charleroi in an SdKfz 251 armoured personnel carrier. Note the rather grim expressions of the crew – those who fought with the Germans in the East were far from universally popular with the civilian population of occupied Belgium. (Josef Charita)**

fierce defensive battles of that summer involved so many foreign volunteer units that Narva has been dubbed the 'Battle of the European SS'. In August *Wallonien* fought stubbornly as they were gradually pushed back from the 'Tannenberg Line', to Kambi, Dorpat and Noela to the Parna-Keerdu line. On 27 August, Degrelle was awarded the Oakleaves to the Knight's Cross; and a few days later SS-Ogruf Steiner, commanding III (germanische) SS-Panzer Korps, decorated 200 men of his brigade with the Iron Cross.

In September–November 1944 the brigade refitted in Hanover and Brunswick, and was raised on paper to divisional status. Although it received some armour, and the same kind of influx of motley replacements as *Langemarck*, it too remained far below true divisional strength, and had only about 4,000 combatants when, late in January 1945, it was posted to the Oder front in Pomerania. In February, under 11. Panzer Armee, it saw fierce defensive fighting around Stargard and Stettin, launching counter-attacks at Streelow, Arnswalde and in the Linden Hills. Some 1,200 survivors were forced back to the Altdamm bridgehead on 8 March; after its evacuation they were briefly rested and inadequately resupplied around Schwedt in the last week of the month. After holding part of the 'Randow-Bruch' defensive line in April, a battalion-strength remnant succeeded in withdrawing into Schleswig-Holstein in early May; others surrendered further south, at Schwerin and Brandenburg. On 8 May, Degrelle – condemned to death *in absentia* by a Belgian court – made good his escape and flew to Spain, where he lived openly until his death in 2000.

SS-Untersturmführer Leon Gillis displays the 'Wallonie' armshield of the first or Army pattern just below the sleeve eagle. Largely hidden here is the standard BeVo-weave cuffband.

Special insignia

Collar patches

The SS runes were worn, despite illustrations, there is no evidence for the use of a patch with the Burgundian 'crossed tagged staffs' motif as carried on the unit's banners.

Cuffband

Léon Degrelle is known to have worn a cuffband with the title *'Wallonie'* (French spelling) in hand-embroidered Gothic script, presumably a unique private purchase. A regulation cuffband was authorised for the division, bearing the title *'Wallonien'* (German spelling). Although this was definitely manufactured and issued, photographic evidence of its actual wear is sparse.

Armshields

Two distinct formats were worn on the left sleeve. The earlier Army type, of ornate shape and machine-woven, had black/yellow/red vertical stripes beneath the word 'WALLONIE' in yellow on a black panel (although the cuffband used German spelling, the armshield retained this French form). The second, machine-embroidered Waffen-SS pattern was of simpler shape.

Edelweiss patch

Although not a mountain unit, the Walloons had at one point been attached to an Army mountain formation (though not the 97. or 100. Divs, which were Jäger or light infantry divisions). Taking advantage of

Two members of the Sturmbrigade on the Eastern Front; the SS-Sturmmann in the foreground wears the 'Wallonie' armshield – apparently in the second or Waffen-SS version – on the left forearm. (Josef Charita)

The Army pattern mountain troops' Edelweiss worn on the upper right sleeve.

a regulation which permitted the wearing of the Edelweiss even after leaving a mountain unit if the right to wear it had been honourably earned, the Walloons persisted in wearing the Army pattern Gebirgsjäger patch on the upper right sleeve.

Spanish SS Volunteer Companies 101 & 102

This very small unit was the last remnant of the Spanish volunteer *Division Azul*, which earned a high reputation on the Russian Front between October 1941 and November 1943 as the Wehrmacht's 250. Infanterie Division (see MAA 103, *Germany's Spanish Volunteers 1941–45*). After Gen Franco withdrew the division under Allied diplomatic pressure, a 1,500-strong 'Blue Legion' fought on until March 1944 on the Narva front. The Blue Legion itself was then withdrawn, but a couple of hundred diehard anti-Communists insisted on remaining, passing on to the Waffen-SS order of battle as SS Freiwilligen Kompanie 101 (spanische) – when formed in June 1944 it was originally named after its barracks, at Stablack near Königsberg. Even at that stage some 150 new volunteers from Spain made their way to German recruiting offices, allowing the raising of Kompanie 102 at Stablack by March 1945. According to the Waffen-SS veterans' magazine *Die Freiwillige*, the Spanish companies were dispersed. Commanded by W-Hstuf Miguel Ezquerra Sanchez, Kompanie 101 fought in the retreat through Pomerania in early 1945 attached to the *Wallonien* Division. Ultimately Capt Ezquerra's unit, at least, was attached to the *Nordland* Division, and fought in the final defensive battles in Berlin. The few survivors of those captured by the Soviets were not released until 1954; Ezquerra himself had managed to escape from his captors and, remarkably, succeeded in making his way back to Spain. No **special insignia** were authorised, but the armshield worn by the Blue Division continued in use, probably on the left upper sleeve: a gold-edged heraldic shield with red, broad yellow, red horizontal stripes, below gold lettering 'ESPAÑA', all on a black background.

OPPOSITE **First and second patterns of the 'Wallonie' armshield. BeVo machine-woven cuffband of the 28. SS-Div *Wallonien*, manufactured and worn in the late stages of the war.**

29. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS (russische Nr.1)

Designations

September 1943	Russkaya Ovsoboditelnava Narodnaya Armija (Russian People's Liberation Army), RONA
March 1944	Volkssheer Brigade Kaminski
July 1944	SS-Sturmbrigade RONA
August 1944?	29. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (russische Nr.1)[4]

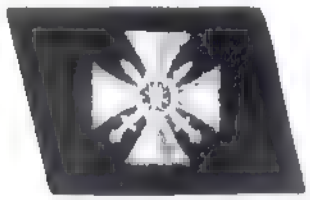
Commanders

Jan 1942–Aug 1944 Waffen-Brigadeführer Bronislav Kaminski

Campaigns

One of the most notorious military rabbles in recent history, this 'division' had its origins in November 1941 at the town of Lokot in the Bryansk region of the Ukraine, which was suffering from the depredations of Soviet partisans and Red Army stragglers. In January 1942 the small self-defence militia formed in November came under the command of the deputy mayor, an engineer named Bronislav Kaminski. Well educated and multi-lingual, Kaminski had attracted the paranoid suspicion of the Soviet authorities, and had emerged from one of the notorious *gulags* with a fanatical hatred of the Communists. The Germans were happy to make use of such men; by March 1942 his militia numbered around 1,600, and in April the Lokot district was granted a limited autonomy. Under Kaminski's leadership the locals rooted out all partisan activity, and farmed their lands so successfully that they were able to provide substantial food supplies to the Germans. Throughout the summer of 1942 Kaminski's militia operated with ruthless zeal alongside German and Hungarian security units, and by the end of the year had expanded to a strength of around 10,000 men.

Insignia associated with the 29. W Gren Div der SS (russische Nr.1). The special collar patch (top) is believed to have been manufactured in at least proof form, but is not known ever to have been worn. (Left) Printed version of the RONA armshield, and (right) an original hand-made example of the type actually worn: black cross on white, red rim, field-grey background, white chain-stitched cyrillic lettering.



Under the patronage of Reichsleiter Alfred Rosenberg, the Minister for Eastern Territories, in May 1943 Lokot was granted increased autonomy as a Bezirksverwaltung (District Administration). Around this time Kaminski began to lobby for the creation of a Russian Nazi Party, with his military force as its Russian People's Liberation Army (*Russkaya Ovgoboditelnava Narodnaya Armiya*) or RONA ('РОНА' in cyrillic characters). Kaminski lived the life of a feudal warlord while his men looted and killed at will. In the face of a continuing regional threat from anything between 15,000 and 25,000 partisans, he pressed every man he could find into his private army – conscripts, and 'turned' Soviet prisoners and stragglers; the local core now represented only about a quarter of the total. The RONA's atrocities increased, but so did desertion, and a brutal discipline was enforced.

4 This designation may have been retrospective and on paper only

Bronislav Kaminski, commander of the notorious Kaminski Brigade, later designated the 29. W Gren Div der SS (russische Nr.1). Although he displays an Iron Cross 1st Class and an Eastern Peoples (Ostvolk) 1st Class Award in Gold, the only actual insignia on his M1936-style tunic is the RONA armshield. His cap also lacks regulation insignia, but bears an oval Russian cockade on the band.

Throughout spring and early summer 1943, RONA troops took part in many anti-partisan sweeps alongside regular German and Hungarian units, as well as another group that was becoming notorious for its barbarity – the Dirlewanger Brigade (see 36. Division below). By June the RONA was organized as a brigade, with five regiments of around 2,000 men each; and in July the Germans even provided Kaminski with 36 captured Soviet field guns and 24 T-34 tanks. However, following the German defeat at Kursk, in September–October 1943 the RONA was forced to retreat westward with its protectors, taking with it a huge train of camp followers and livestock. Kaminski countered defeatist murmurings by publicly strangling an unreliable officer.

By October the RONA had withdrawn into Galicia; and it was then that one its patrons, SS-Gruf Kurt von Gottberg, began to argue for its absorption into the Waffen-SS. Throughout the first half of 1944 the RONA was employed in anti-partisan operations under control of a Kampfgruppe commanded by Gottberg. Its resemblance to a migratory medieval horde made it hard to estimate its fighting strength, but total numbers in its camps are reported as anything up to 27,000 men and women. In July the unit was accepted into the Waffen-SS as SS-Sturmbrigade RONA, and Kaminski himself was commissioned Waffen-Brigadeführer.

In August 1944 perhaps 3,000 RONA men, with five tanks and a couple of 122mm guns, were sent to Warsaw to help put down the Polish Home Army uprising; and it was there that Kaminski's gang reached depths of depravity that offended even the SS. Deployed in the Wola and Ochta districts, they began a drunken orgy of rape, murder and pillage. Supposedly responsible for the deaths of more than 10,000 civilians, they slaughtered patients at the Marie Curie Sklodowska Radium Institute; Kaminski himself apparently participated eagerly in the looting; and two young German servicewomen were reportedly among those raped and murdered.

Kaminski and his senior henchmen were ordered to report to the Lodz HQ of the Higher SS & Police Leader, SS-Ogruf Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, for a conference, when they arrived they were given a brisk drumhead court martial, and shot. In order to avoid a mutiny Kaminski's death was reported as the result of a partisan ambush; the RONA was withdrawn from Warsaw, and disbanded during September 1944. Some 3,000-plus men who were considered reliable were subsequently transferred to Neuhammer to join Gen Andrei Vlasov's Russian Liberation Army (ROA – cyrillic POA), much to the disgust of the latter's Gen Buniacenko[5]. The rest were put to work digging defences on the Oder front; their fate is unknown.

5 See MAA 147 *Foreign Volunteers of the Wehrmacht 1941-45*. LtGen A A Vlasov, the able commander of the Volkhov Front south of Leningrad, changed sides after being captured at the head of 2nd Shock Army in July 1942 and eventually led some 50,000 Russian ex-POWs under German sponsorship. After surrendering to US forces near Prague in May 1945 he was handed over to the Soviets, and his execution was announced in August 1946.

Special insignia

What photographic evidence exists tends to show a mixture of Russian and German uniforms and insignia, but no Waffen-SS items. Kaminski himself seems to have worn no collar patches or sleeve eagle, but a German peaked service cap with a Russian cockade only. An SS-style collar patch was designed and manufactured at some point, showing a Maltese cross and crossed swords, but this does not appear ever to have been issued during the unit's very brief existence as part of the Waffen-SS.

Armshield

A left sleeve shield was widely worn: a white field bearing a black Maltese cross, within a red border, below the cyrillic letters 'РОНА' in white – usually in cham stitch – all on a field-grey background. Surviving genuine examples tend to be crudely made

29. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS (italienische Nr.1)

Designations

November 1943	Italienische Freiwilligen Verband Legione SS Italiana
March 1944	1. Italienische Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade 1a Brigata d'Assalto, Miliza Armata
June 1944	1. Sturmbrigade, Italienische Freiwilligen Legion.
September 1944	9. Waffen Grenadier Brigade der SS (italienische Nr.1)
March 1945	29. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (italienische Nr.1)

On completion of their training, European foreign volunteer recruits for the Waffen-SS swear the oath of allegiance; the exact wording was sometimes altered for nationalities such as Scandinavians, Italians and Hungarians, who 'on paper' were accorded some semblance of national dignity. Note that at this stage no special national or unit insignia are worn. (Josef Charita)

Recruiting poster for the Italian SS – this type of image was produced in many different versions for display throughout occupied Europe. Note the blank right hand collar patch; other posters almost all showed different uniform/insignia combinations.

Commanders

? 1943 Waffen-Brigadeführer Pietro Mannelli, SS-Brigadeführer Peter Hansen; *Oct–Dec 1943* SS-Brigadeführer Gustav Lombard; *? 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Peter Hansen; SS-Standartenführer Constantin Heldmann, *?–May 1945* SS-Oberführer Erwin Tzschoppe

Principal elements

Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 81; Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 82; SS Fusilier Bataillon 29 *Debica*; SS Panzerjäger Abteilung 29; SS Artillerie Regiment 29; SS Pionier Kompanie 29

Campaigns

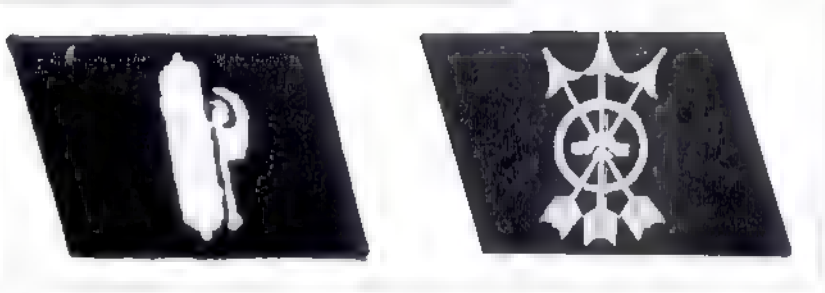
Following the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943, King Victor Emmanuel of Italy dismissed the Fascist government and ordered the arrest of Benito Mussolini. By the time the Allies landed on the mainland on 3 September the new government of Gen Badoglio had already secretly agreed an armistice, which was declared on 8 September. The substantial German forces in Italy immediately moved to disarm the Italian Army and occupy all key points. On 12 September, commandos led by SS-Stubaf Otto Skorzeny made a daring glider landing at the mountaintop hotel on the Gran Sasso where Mussolini was held, and spirited him off to Berlin. Hitler persuaded him to announce a new Fascist regime, the Italian Socialist Republic (RSI), based in German-occupied northern Italy.[6]

On 24 September 1943, Himmler announced the creation of an Italian SS Legion, though not yet as a tactical unit of the Waffen-SS (the term was used in rather the same sense as the 'Latvian Volunteer Legion' described in MAA 415). By December some 15,000 men had reportedly come forward; some were genuine Fascist volunteers, but others former inmates of prison and labour camps released to serve the German cause. During October about 3,000 were sent to the Munsingen training grounds in Germany and to an officer training school at Ferrara; during the winter some 8,600 all ranks were apparently under instruction, including a battalion trained at Debica in Poland which took that town's name. Many RSI units were being formed, changes of title were frequent, and the sources are confused over the manpower of those specifically intended for the SS. Training did not proceed smoothly, and a number of well-motivated volunteer officers resigned over mistreatment of the Italians by German personnel.

The so-called 1st Assault Brigade, Italian Armed Militia first saw action against Communist partisans in February 1944, with its two battalions named *Debica* and *Vendetta*. These would later become respectively I & II Btl, W Gren Regt der SS 81; and *Debica* would later still be retitled SS Fusilier Btl 29. In March both battalions were

6 See MAA 353 *The Italian Army 1940-45 (3) Italy 1943–45*

sent to fight against the Anglo-US landing forces at Anzio/Nettuno, split into dispersed companies deployed alongside German units – whose commanders later gave them favourable reports. They took heavy losses, *Vendetta* suffering 340 casualties from 650 while fighting with 16. SS-Division units against the US 3rd Infantry Division in April. In recognition of their performance, on 3 May Himmler declared these Italian troops to be fully integrated into the Waffen-SS



Insignia associated with the 29. W Gren Div der SS (italienische Nr.1). The *fasces* collar emblem exists on both red and black wool patches. The metal arrows-and-yoke emblem pinned to a black patch has been attributed by different sources to either the *Debica* or *Vendetta* battalion.

The Italian SS troops spent the second half of 1944 dispersed for anti-partisan duties all over northern Italy. In September, following the absorption of other RSI units, they were collectively retitled as 9. Waffen Grenadier Brigade der SS (italienische Nr.1), but this unification was in name only and individual units continued to fight dispersed, entirely on anti-partisan operations. In the last weeks of the war the brigade was officially upgraded as the 29. Waffen Grenadier Division, taking the vacant number of the former Kaminski Brigade. On 30 April 1945 the *Debica* Bn was fortunate enough to surrender to US forces at Gorgonzola; the rest of the Italian SS were forced to surrender to partisans in early May, and many were reportedly executed more or less out of hand

Special insignia

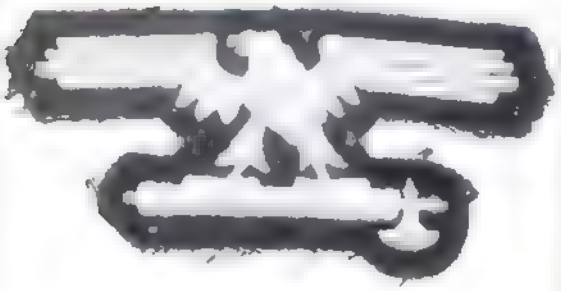
Collar patches

Photographs of these troops show a remarkable range of insignia on their mainly Italian uniforms (sometimes with German headgear), and their blurred unit organization has made details hard to confirm. The SS rank collar patches were worn, initially in silver, silver-grey or white metal on red underlay. These were sometimes in 'mirrored' pairs and sometimes with a plain red right hand patch; there is also some evidence for individual wear of SS-runes on a red patch. After full Waffen-SS integration, from 15 June 1944 black collar patches were ordered, and mirrored rank patches were no longer displayed. Many photographs show plain black right hand patches, and a few, SS-runes; others show red patches worn until at least winter 1944/45. A special black patch showing the Italian *fasces* motif – an axe tied into a bundle of rods, its head to the right – is also known, but there is no photographic proof of its being worn. Yet another motif was certainly added to black right hand patches by either the *Debica* or the *Vendetta* battalion – sources are contradictory; this was three splayed arrows, joined centrally by a yoke within a 'rope' circle, in white metal.

Sleeve & cap eagles

The Italian SS used a distinctive sleeve eagle, with the normal wreathed swastika replaced by the fasces, axehead at bottom right. This eagle existed in both silver hand-embroidery and silver-grey machine-embroidery, on both red and black backgrounds. The same badge was manufactured in white metal for wear on the peaked cap

Waffen-SS pattern Italian armshield, in yellow with red details on a black background; no photographic evidence for its wear has yet surfaced.



There is plentiful evidence for the wear of the Italian pattern SS eagle on both red and later black wool backgrounds as the left sleeve emblem, and in white metal as the upper cap badge.

Armshield

An SS-style sleeve shield was manufactured, with a yellow inset border and a yellow fasces motif (axehead at top, to left) with red details, machine-embroidered on black cloth. However, there seems to be no photographic evidence for its wear by SS troops – nor for that of another known type, a plain red/white/green tricolour shield with a narrow black border.

30. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS (russische Nr.2)

Designations

July 1944	Schutzmannschaft Brigade Siegling
August 1944	30. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (russische Nr.2)
January 1945	Waffen Grenadier Brigade der SS (weissruthenische Nr.1)

Commander

Aug 1944–Mar 1945 SS-Standartenführer Hans Siegling

Principal elements (October 1944)

Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 75; Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 76; Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 77; ?Waffen Artillerie Regiment der SS 30 (in July the brigade is listed as having Artillerie and Panzerjäger Abteilungen, a Reiter Schwadron and service companies numbered 30)

Collar patch insignia associated with the 30. W Gren Div der SS (russische Nr.2). The Russian Orthodox cross is believed to have been both made and worn at least to some extent, as is the Trident of Vladimir; there is no photographic evidence for the issue or wear of either the wolf's head patch, or the buckler-and-*kinjal* associated with Tartar volunteers.

Campaigns

By the time this formation was assembled in July 1944 it was already evident that the Red Army – whose Operation 'Bagration' would very soon destroy Germany's Army Group Centre and force a vast westward salient into the Russian Front – could not be prevented from driving the Wehrmacht out of Russia. Most of the Ukrainian, Belorussian and Russian volunteers or conscripts in German-controlled rear area security units therefore had little to lose by retreating with their masters to escape Soviet vengeance; but many of these auxiliary police still proved highly reluctant to be transformed into battlefield units.

About a dozen of these Schutzmannschaft ('Schuma') battalions were brought together to form a brigade, and during August this was absorbed into the Waffen-SS and designated as a division. Four regiments were originally ordered formed, respectively from Schuma Btl 57, 60, 61, & Polizei Gebiets Kommandantur Minsk; 62, 63, 64 & PGK Glebokie/Lida; PGK Slusk, Baranovitski & Vileika; and PGK Slonim & Polizeiführer Pripet.

The Army pattern machine-woven armshield in red and white for 'White Ruthenian' volunteers.

Cavalry and artillery units were formed from Schuma Btl 68 & 56. Many of these units were already grossly understrength, however (Schuma Btl 61 had only 102 men); the formation was further weakened by desertions, and by at least one major mutiny by Ukrainian and Russian personnel of the first two regiments, which were harshly purged.

In September 1944 the division was sent to France for anti-partisan operations; it was felt that service so far from home amid people speaking an alien language would discourage desertions, but this proved optimistic, and there was a steady drain of men who chose to go over to the French *maquis* despite these obstacles. During late 1944 the division fell back eastwards as the Allies advanced. In October it was reinforced when Regt 77 was formed from Btl Murayev & Ost Btl 654, and the division was supposed to provide security for the Rhine crossings. In November personnel saw brief action against Gen de Lattre's 1st French Army advancing from the south before retreating to positions on the German/Swiss border. Reduced to fewer than 4,500 men, in January 1945 the 30th was officially downgraded to a brigade (given the national suffix 'White Ruthenian', after a German term for the Carpathian region of the Ukraine). Almost simultaneously it was disbanded, the NCO cadre being posted to other Waffen-SS units and the remainder to Gen Vlasov's ROA (see Russian 29. Division, above)

Special insignia

Collar patches

Several variants have been suggested. A patch with a version of the Russian Orthodox cross – a horizontal bar crossed by shorter bars near each end – was manufactured and is known to have been worn. The Ukrainian *tryzub* or 'Trident of Vladimir' design (see MAA 415, 14. Division) was made, and may have been worn. Patches featuring respectively a wolf's head motif, and a superimposed buckler and *kinjal* knife, were also manufactured, but no evidence for their actual issue has been found.

Armshield

A machine-woven pattern is known: a white field, with a white vertical Orthodox cross on a red central vertical stripe, below a panel with the inscription 'Weissruthenien'.

31. SS-FREIWILLIGEN GRENADIER DIVISION

Designation

October 1944–May 1945 31. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division

Commanders

Oct 1944–? 1945 SS-Brigadeführer Gustav Lombard; *? Feb 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Wilhelm Trabandt

Principal elements

SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 78; SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 79; SS-Freiwilligen Panzerjäger Abteilung 31; SS-Artillerie Regiment 31; SS-Freiwilligen Aufklärungs Abteilung 31; SS-Freiwilligen

Pionier Abteilung 31 (plus Feb 1945 SS-Frw Gren Regt 80/'Polizei Regt Brixen'/'SS-Regt Schön'; SS-Frw Fus Abt 31/'W Bn der SS Szálasi')

Campaigns

This division was formed predominantly from Hungarian Volks-deutsche conscripts, around a German cadre from the disbanded 23. Division *Kama* (see MAA 415). The rankers were of varied age and experience: about one-third younger than 19, and another third Hungarian Army veterans over 40. Pressganged, very short of uniforms and equipment, and mostly non-German speakers, they showed low morale in the face of the ominous advance of the Red Army, and this was little improved even by assurances that their families would be evacuated from threatened areas.

Although their training and equipping was painfully slow, elements were deployed to escort the evacuation of civilian Volksdeutsche across the Danube; and some 2,600 men formed Kampfgruppe Syr (later Regt 79), attached to the Army's elite *Brandenburg* Division in an attempt to hold up the approaching Soviets at Titel. Less than half of the division's 14,000 men had yet received any weapons. From 26 October all attempts to provide training were abandoned and the half-armed division was sent to hold defensive positions along an impossible 37 mile (60km) stretch of the Danube. A new Soviet offensive on 7 November opened several weeks of severe defensive fighting; although the division was judged of minimal combat value, and repeated orders had to be given for the summary execution of deserters, elements did make a successful defence of a Danube island near the historic battlefield of Mohács. Under enormous pressure the 31. Division disintegrated into small battle-groups in the last week of November.

Gustav Lombard, here seen as an SS-Standartenführer, was a former cavalry regiment commander with the *Florian Geyer* Division who was promoted to major-general's rank and led 31. SS-Frw Gren Div in Hungary in winter 1944/45.

Attempts were made to re-form it in mid-December, with 8,000-plus men assembled at Eisenburg; a move to Lower Styria for refitting had to be accomplished on foot due to lack of transport. After some anti-partisan activity, in March 1945 the remnant was attached to SS-Kampfgruppe Trabandt and reinforced with additional Kampfgruppen. It was never again a cohesive entity; and as the Red Army advanced into Austria in April the survivors, about five battalions strong, became dispersed once again. Some surrendered at Königgrätz in early May; others, trying to reach the Western Allies, were hunted down by Czech partisans.

Special insignia

None are known, although post-war fantasy pieces with the inscription *'Bohmen Mähren'* were made.

SS-Standartenführer Johannes Mühlenkamp, commander of the 32. Frw Gren Div *30 Januar* during January and February 1945. Mühlenkamp had already had a distinguished career as a Panzer regiment commander with the elite 5. SS-Pz Div *Wiking*, and held the Oakleaves to the Knight's Cross.

32. SS-FREIWILLIGEN GRENADIER DIVISION *30 JANUAR*[7]

Designation

January–May 1945 32. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division *30 Januar*

Commanders

Jan–Feb 1945 SS-Standartenführer Johannes Mühlenkamp; *Feb 1945* SS-Standartenführer Joachim Richter; *Feb–Mar 1945* SS-Oberführer Adolf Ax; *Mar–May 1945* SS-Standartenführer Hans Kempin

Principal elements

SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 86; SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 87 *Falke*; SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 88; SS-Fusilier Abteilung 32; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 32; SS-Freiwilligen Artillerie Regiment 32; SS-Flak Abteilung 32; SS-Pionier Abteilung 32

Campaigns

This very short-lived formation was assembled in January 1945 from various units such as Kampfgruppe Schill and Kampfgruppe Kurmarck padded out with personnel from SS training schools and recruit depots. It reached a reasonable size – around 12,000 men – before being committed to combat on the Oder front in February and March. It suffered heavy casualties, the remnants being pushed back to the area south-east of Berlin to fight under 9. Armee in the closing days of the war. In late April some elements fought their way out of a rapidly closing encirclement in the Spree river bend and retreated westwards, surrendering at Tangermunde in May.

Special insignia

None are known; cuffbands bearing the divisional title '*30 Januar*' are post-war fantasy pieces.

33. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS *CHARLEMAGNE* (französische Nr.1)

Designations

October 1943	Französische SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment
November 1943	Französische SS-Freiwilligen Regiment 57
July 1944	Französische SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade

7 The title was taken from the date in 1933 when Hitler achieved power

Insignia of the 33. W Gren Div der SS *Charlemagne*. The standard SS-runes collar patch was universally worn in this formation; the 'Sword of St Joan' patch was never issued or worn. It is one of the quite numerous national variants which were designed and illustrated before the end of the war, and which may have been manufactured in small sample batches but never in any numbers, thus confusing the record for post-war researchers.

August 1944	Waffen Grenadier Brigade der SS *Charlemagne*[8] (französische Nr.1)
February 1945	33. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS *Charlemagne* (französische Nr.1)

Commanders

Feb 1945 Waffen-Oberführer Edgar Puaud; *Feb–Apr 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Dr Gustav Krukenberg; *Apr–May* 1945 SS-Standartenführer Walter Zimmermann; *May 1945* Waffen-Hauptsturmführer Henri Fenet

Principal elements

Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 57; Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 58; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 33; SS-Artillerie Bataillon 33; SS-Pionier Kompanie 33

Campaigns

Following the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941, right wing factions in occupied France called for the creation of a volunteer French legion to fight in the East. Some 5,800 of about 13,000 applicants were initially accepted, and the first batch left for training at Debica, Poland, in September 1941. Commanded by Col Roger Labonne, this Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchévisme (LVF) was attached to the German Army as the two-battalion Reinforced Infantry Regiment 638, which saw immediate combat when it arrived with 7. Infanterie Division on the Moscow front in November. The LVF lost about half its strength by February 1942, although some 1,400 replacements from France had brought it up to three battalions. Pulled out of the line in March, the remaining two battalions (I & III) were used for dispersed anti-partisan operations throughout 1942 and 1943, occasionally suffering significant casualties. In June 1943 the II Btl was re-raised, Col Edgar Puaud was appointed CO, and the unit was brought together under 286th Security Division. Meanwhile, continued signs of French willingness to enlist in pro-German units led Himmler to explore the possibility of taking French volunteers into the Waffen-SS. By January 1943 a recruiting office had been set up in Paris; in July the Vichy government authorized enlistments; and in November, the first batches of French officers and NCOs entered the Bad Tölz and Posen training schools. This decision heralded the absorption of the LVF as the Französische SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment; the official date is variously reported, but the unit was in action against Soviet partisans in January–February 1944.

When the Red Army launched its June 1944 offensive the regiment distinguished itself in furious defensive fighting. Withdrawn into Bohemia in July for rest and refitting, it was renamed Französische SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade *Charlemagne*, and subsequently deployed alongside the 18. SS-Division *Horst Wessel*. During August the unit took further heavy punishment in the Carpathian Mountains of Hungary, losing over 80 per cent its officers killed and 790 rankers dead or

continued on page 33

8 Named after Charles the Great, AD 768–814, crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800, the most renowned of the Carolingian dynasty of Frankish kings.

VOLKSDEUTSCHE & RUSSIAN DIVISIONS

1: SS-Sturmmann, 24. Waffen Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Div der SS; Austro-Yugoslav border, autumn 1944

2: Grenadier, 30. Waffen Grenadier Div der SS, Rhine front, winter 1944

3: Waffen-Obersturmfuhrer, Waffen Artillerie Regt der SS 25; Neuhammer, spring 1945

BELGIAN DIVISIONS

1 SS-Unterscharfuhrer, 28. SS-Frw Gren Div *Wallonien*; Pomerania, spring 1945

2 SS-Sturmann, Panzerjäger Kompanie, 28. SS-Frw Gren Div *Wallonien*; Pomerania, spring 1945

3. SS-Schutze, 27. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Div *Langemarck*; Altdamm bridgehead, March 1945

EASTERN FRONT, 1945

1: SS-Hauptscharführer, 31. SS-Frw Gren Div; Austria, March 1945

2: SS-Untersturmführer, SS- u Polizei Fusilier Abt 35; Niesse front, April 1945

3: SS-Scharfuhrer, schwere SS-Panzer Abteilung 502; Oder front, March 1945

ITALIAN VOLUNTEERS

1: Waffen-Sturmbannführer, Legione SS Italiana, January 1944

2: Schutze, 1. Italienische Frw Sturmbrigade; Nettuno front, April 1944

3: Waffen-Scharführer, 29. Waffen Gren Div der SS (italienische Nr.1); N Italy, April 1945

D

ANTI-PARTISAN UNITS

1: SS-Rottenführer, SS Sonderregiment Dirlewanger; Belorussia, June 1944

2: Waffen-Hauptsturmführer, SS-Sturmbrigade RONA, Warsaw, August 1944

3: Schütze, SS-Sturmbrigade RONA, Warsaw, August 1944

DUTCH & FRENCH VOLUNTEERS

1: SS-Oberscharfuhrer, SS-Pionier Kompanie 33; Berlin, April 1945

2: Grenadier, 33. Waffen Gren Div der SS *Charlemagne*; Pomerania, February 1945

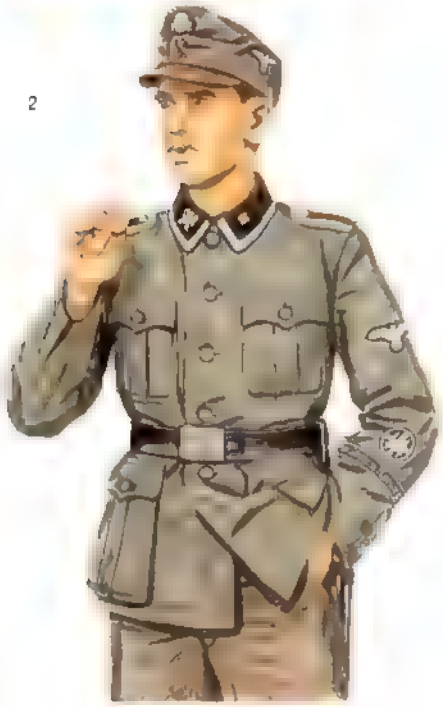
3: SS-Unterscharführer, Landstorm Nederland; Holland, autumn 1944

CAMOUFLAGE CLOTHING, 1944–45

1. SS-Schutze, 38. SS-Gren Div *Nibelungen*; Upper Bavaria, May 1945
2. SS-Rottenführer, 32. SS-Frw Gren Div *30 Januar*; '9th Army Pocket', April 1945
3. SS-Funker, SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade *Langemarck*; Zhitomir, Russia, January 1944

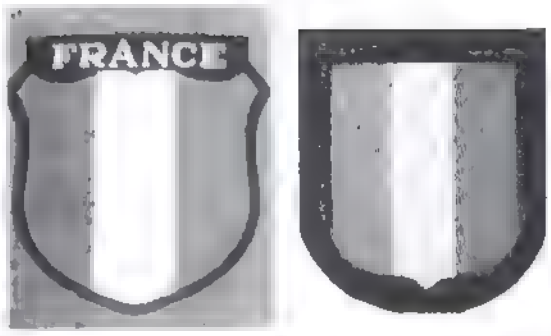
NORDIC' VOLUNTEERS

1: SS-Sturmmann, Finnisches Freiwilligen Bataillon der Waffen-SS, autumn 1941
2: Legions-Unterscharfuhrer, Frw Legion Norwegen, summer 1942
3: SS-Rottenfuhrer, Britisches Freikorps, 1944
4: SS-Hauptscharfuhrer, Ersatzkompanie, Freikorps Danmark, autumn 1941



wounded. (One source gives September 1944 as the date of the LVF's official disbandment, but this may have been a retrospective announcement.)

Rebuilt at Wildflecken, the retitled Waffen Grenadier Brigade *Charlemagne* received replacements from several sources, including men of the Milice and other collaborators who had been obliged to leave France ahead of the Allied and Free French liberation forces. In February 1945 it received its final change of title, to the 33. Waffen Grenadier Division; this did not reflect an expansion to true divisional size, however, since it had only some 7,500 men.



The Army-pattern machine-woven armshield with 'France' panel; and the later Waffen-SS pattern with a broad black border.

In mid-February the division was despatched to Hammerstein, Pomerania, where it was struck by a massive Soviet assault and almost at once fragmented into three main elements. One battlegroup, under the divisional commander SS-Brigaf Dr Gustav Krukenberg, fought its way to the Baltic coast and was fortunate enough to be shipped to Denmark, whence it transferred to Neustrelitz in Mecklenburg. During March the other units, led by W-Oberf Puaud, were driven by the Red Army from successive positions near Hammerstein, Körlin and Kolberg. About 3,200 survivors and replacements seem to have gathered at Neustrelitz and Wildflecken at the end of March.

In April 1945 the divisional commander gave these Frenchmen the choice of being released from their oath, and about 800 drifted away or were allocated to construction units. Krukenberg led the remainder to take part in the defence of Berlin, as Kampfgruppe *Charlemagne*, attached to the 11. SS-Division *Nordland*; identified units were Kampfbataillon 58, and SS-Bataillon Fenet under the former CO of Regt 57. Reportedly, KBtl 58 withdrew westwards in time to surrender with some other elements to British forces at Bad Kleinen and Wismar. In the last few days of the war W-Hstuf Fenet's handful of survivors proved themselves adept tank-killers in the shattered streets of the capital, the last 30-odd men surrendering near the Potsdamer rail station.

Special Insignia

Collar patches

A special right hand patch showing 'the Sword of St Joan' flanked by sprays of laurel was produced, but there is no evidence for its issue or wear.

Cuffband

A cuffband in BeVo weave with the inscription '*Charlemagne*' was manufactured, and is believed to have been worn in limited numbers. Reports from surviving veterans suggest that when supplies arrived the

The BeVo machine-woven 'Charlemagne' cuffband, briefly worn in small numbers at the end of the war, perhaps only by members of the assault engineer company.

A member of the SS-Feldgendarmerie detachment of *Landstorm Nederland* photographed during the surrender of the unit to Canadian troops at the Schuppen cigar factory in Veenendal, Holland, in May 1945. The BeVo-woven cuffband can be seen clearly; but note that there is no Dutch national armshield.

divisional commander insisted that they could only be worn by men who had earned the right in battle

Armshields

Two principal forms existed among a number of variants. The earliest, Army insignia was a heraldic shield with vertical stripes in blue/white/red, below a black panel bearing 'FRANCE' in white. The second, official Waffen-SS pattern is of plainer, round-bottomed shape and lacks the lettered panel. Photographs show the shield worn sometimes on the right upper sleeve, but more commonly on the left below the sleeve eagle.

34. SS-FREIWILLIGEN DIVISION *LANDSTORM NEDERLAND*

Designations

October 1943	Landstorm Nederland
November 1944	SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Brigade *Landstorm Nederland*
February 1945	34. SS Freiwilligen Grenadier Division *Landstorm Nederland*

Commanders

Apr 1943–June 1944 SS-Hauptsturmführer Friedrich Ziegler; *June–Nov 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Wagner; *Nov 1944–May 1945* SS-Oberführer Martin Kohlroser

Principal elements

SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 83; SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Regiment 84; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung *Nordwest*; SS-Flak Battalion *Clingendaal*

Campaigns

In March 1943 this organization was formed from the Dutch territorial home defence force, the *Landwacht Nederlande*, under a cadre of German officers. That October it was brought under SS control, given a new title in German spelling, and reinforced by drafting in 3,500-plus members of the Dutch equivalent of the Allgemeine-SS. It was reportedly used for anti-Resistance operations in north-west Holland. In September 1944 some elements were attached to a Kampfgruppe under Gen Hans von Tettau and briefly deployed against the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem. Although there was significant desertion by men unwilling to fight the Western Allies, in November the *Landstorm Nederland* was taken into the Waffen-SS order of battle as a brigade, then having a strength of around 7,000 men. Various other Dutch personnel were added to the brigade until,

SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Wagner, commander of *Landstorm Nederland* from June to November 1944.

in February 1945, it was redesignated on paper as a division. It saw no serious combat, and surrendered to Canadian troops at Veenendaal in May 1945

Special insignia

Collar patches

A collar patch bearing either the horizontal or vertical pattern 'Wolfsangel' rune (see MAA 415, 23 Division) is believed to have been worn. Another, bearing a flaming grenade, is confirmed by photographic evidence; the insignia of the original Landwacht, this was manufactured in both metal pin-on and embroidered forms, and was worn both on the right collar and in place of the death's-head on the cap

Cuffband

A BeVo-woven cuffband bearing the inscription *'Landstorm Nederland'* is known to have been issued and worn.

Armshield

Dutch tricolour shields, as illustrated in MAA 115 for the 23. Division, were also worn by some personnel.

35. SS- und POLIZEI GRENADIER DIVISION

Designation

February–May 1945 35. SS- und Polizei Grenadier Division

Commanders

Feb–March 1945 SS-Oberführer Johannes Wirth; *Mar–May 1945* SS-Standartenführer Rüdiger Pipkorn

Principal elements

SS- u.Polizei Grenadier Regiment 89; SS- u.Polizei Grenadier Regiment 90; SS- u.Polizei Grenadier Regiment 91; SS- u.Polizei Füsilier Abteilung 35; SS- u.Polizei Panzerjäger Abteilung 35; SS- u.Polizei Artillerie Regiment 35, SS- u.Polizei Pionier Abteilung 35

Campaigns

Despite its impressively comprehensive order of battle on paper, this was very much a 'last ditch' formation, and any units actually formed were probably understrength and under-equipped. Formation was ordered as late as February 1945; it was based on the staff of the Polizei Schule in Dresden, with a company from the SS-Junkerschule in Braunschweig, and fusilier, anti-tank, artillery and signals personnel from the Polizei Waffenschule at Hellerau. In March, SS-Polizei Schützen Regts 29 & 30 were added. As Kampfgruppe Thurm, it was sent into action in April on the Niesse front south-east of Berlin; but on the 27th, Soviet troops

Collar patches worn by members of the *Landstorm Nederland*: the earlier vertical and later horizontal *Wolfsangel* rune, as also worn by the *Frw Legion Nederland*; and the flaming grenade patch of the original unit, peculiar to the *Landstorm*.

The BeVo machine-woven 'Landstorm Nederland' cuffband.

overran the divisional HQ and SS-Staf Pipkorn was killed. The division became fragmented, some elements reaching the Elbe to surrender to US forces in the first three days of May, the others being captured by the Red Army at Halbe on 7 May.

No **special insignia** were worn.

36. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS

Designations

June 1940	Wilddiebkommando Oranienburg
September 1940	SS-Sonderbataillon Dirlewanger
May 1943	SS-Sonderregiment Dirlewanger
December 1944	SS-Sturmbrigade Dirlewanger
February 1945	36. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS

Commanders

1940–Feb 1945 SS-Oberführer Dr Oskar Dirlewanger; *Mar–May 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Schmedes

Principal elements (1944)

Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 72; Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 73; Waffen Fusilier Kompanie 36; Waffen Artillerie Abteilung 36

Campaigns

This unit was rivalled in brutal depravity only by Kaminski's RONA. Its origins lay in a bizarre suggestion made to Hitler that a unit raised from convicted poachers would have the ideal fieldcraft skills for hunting partisans. He approved the idea, and a small penal company was formed on 15 June 1940 as the 'Oranienberg Poacher Commando', made up of criminal (non-political) prisoners enlisted from various prisons and concentration camps. In September, now about 300 strong, it received equipment from the SS-Totenkopfverbände, and was renamed after its commander: 'SS Special Battalion Dirlewanger'. This degenerate figure, who had been imprisoned for sex offences with a minor, nevertheless enjoyed high level protection as a former comrade of recruitment chief SS-Ogruf Gottlob Berger.

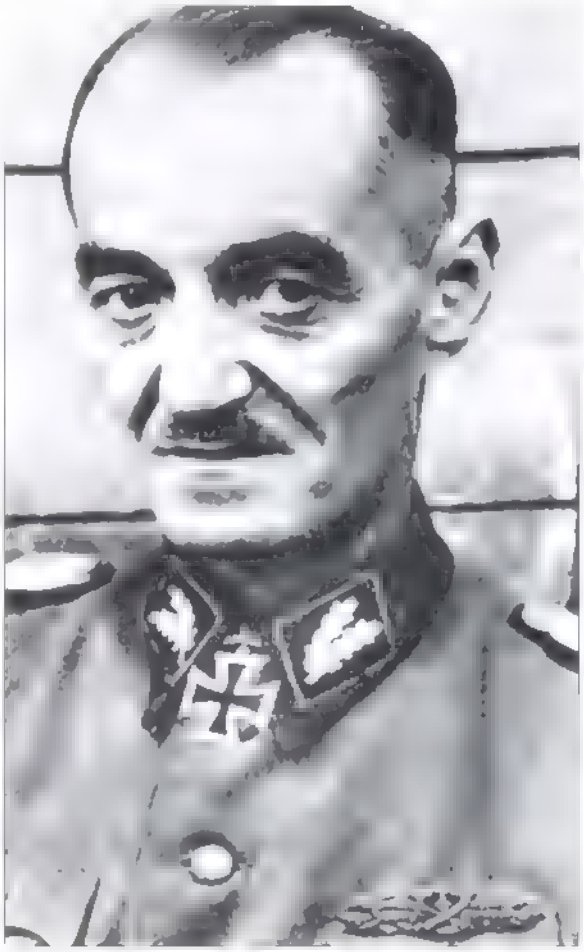
In October 1940 the unit was sent to occupied Poland for security duties; reports of atrocities began almost immediately, and continued throughout 1941. Rape and murder were accompanied by looting, which is probably what drew Dirlewanger's gang to the disapproving attention of the SS legal staff and of SS-Ogruf Krüger, the Higher SS & Police Leader of the Generalgouvernement. Despite his friends in high places, Dirlewanger's unit – now an 'SS Special Regiment' – was transferred in January 1942 to Belorussia. Immediately upon arrival it began recruiting locally for anti-partisan operations, upon which it was exclusively employed until November 1943, cementing its reputation for barbarity.

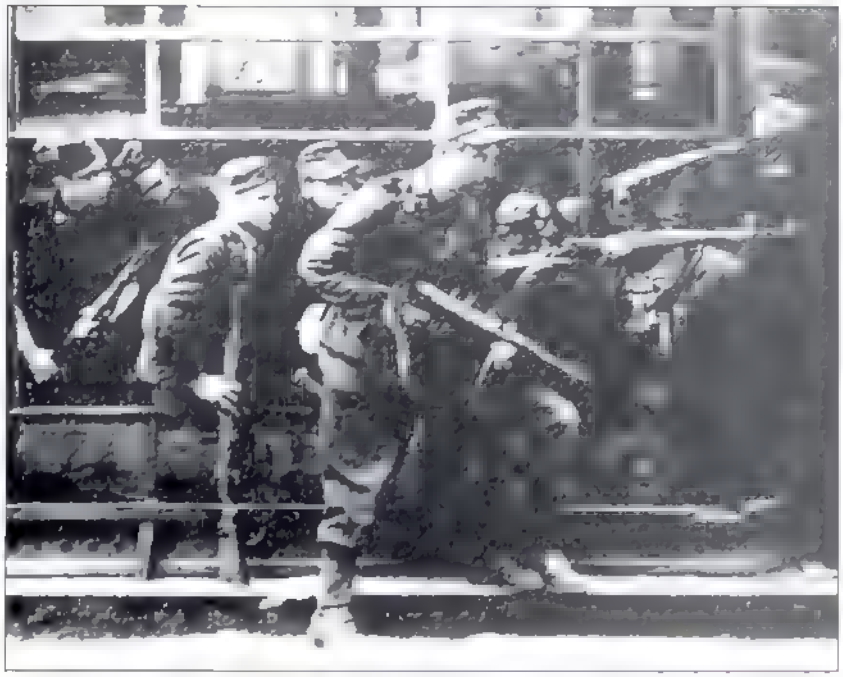
Despite its notoriety the unit was expanded to two battalions in August 1942; and Dirlewanger himself was decorated for 'bravery' in May and October. In January 1943 the unit was permitted collar patches and badges of rank (normally forbidden to penal units). The original romantic concept of its being manned by poachers was long forgotten; it accepted riff-raff of all types – German and foreign, military and civilian – and in March 1943 service in the unit was offered as a means of 'redeeming' themselves to virtually all convicted felons. Disorderliness extended to repeated shooting incidents between Russian and Lithuanian enlistees, and discipline was enforced by physical brutality, even to officers. Large scale anti-partisan operations sometimes cost the unit significant casualties (some 300 in February–August 1943); a third battalion was then authorized.

For a brief period in November–December 1943 the regiment found itself in front line combat under Army Group Centre, and suffered greatly increased casualties, reducing it to about 260 men. Dirlewanger was then awarded the German Cross in Gold, a decoration second only to the Knight's Cross. His penal regiment was rebuilt in early 1944 with convicts from German military prisons; by February it counted 1,200 men, and in April another 800 replacements were allocated. Anti-partisan battles in Belorussia during May and June were followed by rearguard fighting during the July retreat into Poland following the Red Army's Operation 'Bagration'.

In August 1944, like Kaminski's renegade Russians, Dirlewanger's uncontrollable convicts recorded new depths of depravity when they were assigned to help crush the Warsaw uprising. They drank, raped and murdered their way through the Old Town, slaughtering fighters and civilians alike without distinction of age or sex. It is reported that a staff officer sent to summon Dirlewanger before the overall operation commander, SS-Ogruf von dem Bach-Zelewski, was driven off at gunpoint. Unlike Kaminski, Dirlewanger was not executed for his atrocities, but received the ultimate accolade – award of the Knight's Cross.

SS-Oberführer Dr Oskar Dirlewanger, probably the most repulsive figure to have tainted the rolls of the Knight's Cross. Imprisoned for two years in 1935 for sexual offences, this former World War I and Freikorps comrade of SS-Ogruf Gottlob Berger was a 45-year-old colonel in the Allgemeine-SS reserve in 1940, when Berger secured him a lieutenant's commission in the Waffen-SS. He was then authorized to raise a unit of 'poachers' – in fact, civilian and military criminals of all kinds – at Oranienburg, the SS-Totenkopf-verbände headquarters. Reports of his personal looting and atrocities in Poland attracted the attention of an SS judge advocate, Conrad Morgen, but Dirlewanger's friendship with Berger protected him even from the Higher SS & Police Leader for Poland, Friedrich Krüger.





Dirlewanger's men in action. At their post-war trials SS-Ogrufs Berger and Bach-Zelewski both denied that this unit – responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians during the suppression of the Warsaw uprising – was part of the Waffen-SS. However, a text of August 1944 by Himmler himself clearly identified it as a Waffen-SS penal unit. That March, the chief judge advocate SS-Staf Bender had advised Himmler to send to Dirlewanger only those military convicts rejected by the penal 500th SS Parachute Battalion.

In late August an uprising broke out in Slovakia; in September SS-Ogruf Berger was named Higher SS & Police Leader Slovakia, and in mid-October his protégé's unit was transferred there. The Dirlewanger regiment (weakened by heavy air attack while en route) saw combat against the Slovak rebels around Biely Potok, Liptovska Osada and Treicy; although successful, the unit reportedly suffered a number of desertions. In November 1944 permission was given for some members to transfer to other Waffen-SS units, and strength was built up to brigade level with further drafts of criminals.

In February 1945, while stationed in Hungary, the unit was redesignated as 36. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS, though in reality it never reached anything like divisional strength. In that month Dirlewanger returned to Germany for hospital treatment, and was replaced by Fritz Schmedes. The division rapidly crumbled under the impact of the Soviet spring offensive in April 1945, and many men deserted before it was encircled in the Halbe pocket. On about 29 April some elements were captured by the Red Army south-east of Berlin, and were summarily executed. A few may have succeeded in surrendering to US troops. There have been many rumours as to Dirlewanger's personal fate; recent forensic research suggests that he was captured by Polish troops in June 1945 and that, when his identity was discovered, he was beaten to death.

Finally, it should be noted that in the closing stage of the war several Army units were briefly attached to the 36. Division (e.g. Gren Regt 1244, schwere PzJr Abt 681, and Pz Abt Stansdorf I); there is no suggestion that these units were involved in any of the grisly war crimes committed by Dirlewanger's rabble.

The collar patch of Dirlewanger's unit, known to have been manufactured and worn. It was only unique to this unit as a right hand patch; it was also worn, but in 'mirrored' pairs, by the lesser known Kampfgruppe Dora, which had no connection with Dirlewanger.

SS-Untersturmführer Scherschel, from 37. SS-Frw Kav Div *Lützow*, one of the several formations that had no special identifying insignia. This 1945 portrait is interesting in showing a late war M1943 cap with silver officer's crown piping and one-piece machine-embroidered insignia on a trapezoid patch; the tunic collar pressed open over a shirt collar and tie; and the use of an Army rather than SS pattern eagle on the sleeve.

Special Insignia
A right hand collar patch depicting crossed rifles above a stick grenade was paired with conventional left hand rank patches. This was not in fact unique to Dirlewanger's troops: another small SS unit, Kampfgruppe Dora, wore the same patch, but on both collars in 'mirror image' style

37. SS-FREIWILLIGEN KAVALLERIE DIVISION *LÜTZOW*

Designation
February–May 1945 37. SS-Freiwilligen Kavallerie Division *Lutzow*[9]

Commanders
Feb 1945 SS-Oberführer Waldemar Fegelein; *Mar 1945* SS-Obersturmbannführer Karl Gesele; *Mar–May 1945* SS-Obersturmbannführer Karl-Heinz Keitel

Principal elements (projected)
SS-Kavallerie Regiment 92; SS-Kavallerie Regiment 93; SS-Kavallerie Regiment 94; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 37 (incl. 1 co Hetzers); SS-Artillerie Abteilung 37; SS-Aufklärungs Abteilung 37; SS-Pionier Abteilung 37

Campaigns
This division was formed in early 1945 from those elements of 8. & 22. SS-Kav Divs *Florian Geyer* and *Maria Theresia* that had not been destroyed in Budapest, with the addition of various Hungarian and German stragglers, and teenage Hungarian Volksdeutsche conscripts. At first assembled at Bratislava as a new replacement depot for the SS cavalry, these troops were allocated on 19 February to form the 37 Division, which took its place in the Waffen-SS order of battle on 1 March; the original commander was Hermann Fegelein's younger brother, who had led a regiment in the *Florian Geyer* (see MAA 404). It is unclear how many battalions were actually raised, but the formation was certainly much understrength, inadequately trained and very poorly armed and equipped; transport was reportedly dependent upon teams of oxen. In late March a Kampfgruppe of about 2,000 men, commanded by SS-Ostubaf Karl-Heinz Keitel (son of GFM Keitel), was despatched to the front at Wiener-Neustadt, and saw heavy combat around Puchberg as part of 6. SS-Panzer Armee. In early May the formation fell apart under relentless Soviet pressure, though remnants did succeed

9 The honour title awarded only on 19 April 1945 commemorated LtGen Adolf Freiherr von Lützow 1782–1834 the renowned cavalry officer who led a Freikorps against the French in the Prussian War of Liberation 1813–14

in surrendering to US rather than Soviet forces in Austria, its final strength was less than 200 men

No **special insignia** were authorized, manufactured or worn

38. SS-GRENADIER DIVISION *NIBELUNGEN*

Designation
March–May 1945 38. SS-Grenadier Division *Nibelungen*

Commanders
May 1945 SS-Standartenführer Hans Kempin; *Apr 45* SS-Obersturmbannführer Richard Schulze; *May 1945* SS-Gruppenführer Martin Stange

Principal elements (projected)
SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 95; SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 96; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 38; SS-Artillerie Abteilung 38; SS-Pionier Abteilung 38

Campaigns
This 'last ditch' unit was ordered formed in March 1945, around a core of staff from the SS-Junkerschule at Bad Tölz in Bavaria, padded out with remnants from other divisions including 6. *Nord* and 12. *Hitlerjugend*. By April, when Himmler sent a draft from his own escort battalion, it had still only assembled fewer than 3,000 men. This nucleus was committed to battle in mid-April against US troops in Upper Bavaria; after heavy fighting at Pastetten and Oberwössen, the survivors surrendered on 8 May

No **special insignia** were authorised or worn; cuffbands bearing the title *'Nibelungen'* in machine-embroidered or -woven form are post-war fantasy pieces

A former combat veteran of the *Leibstandarte*, one-time SS adjutant to Adolf Hitler, and latterly commandant of the SS-Junkerschule at Bad Tölz in Bavaria, SS-Obersturmbannführer Richard Schulze (who changed his name to Schulze-Kossens after the war) commanded the embryo 38. SS-GrenDiv *Nibelungen* during April 1945.

MISCELLANEOUS FOREIGN CONTINGENTS

As well as those foreign Legions which evolved into the numbered Waffen-SS divisions, a number of other foreign units came under Waffen-SS control. Some were too small to make anything but a propaganda contribution to the German war effort; and others were only nominally Waffen-SS units, transferred to SS control late in the war. Some Legions and other units are covered in photo captions or in the commentaries to colour Plate H. Others which should be noted are as follows:

10 [illegible]-nour Life refers to a mythical race celebrated in the 11th century German epic poem *Nibelungenlied* and in Richard Wagner's 19th century opera cycle

Osttürkischer Waffen-verband der SS

Commanders

Nov 1943–Mar 1944 SS-Obersturmbannführer Andreas Meyer-Mader; *Mar–Apr 1944* SS-Hauptsturmführer Billig; *Apr–May 1944* SS-Hauptsturmführer Hermann; *June–Aug 1944* SS-Sturmbannführer Franz Liebermann; *Sept–Oct 1944* SS-Hauptsturmführer Reiner Olzscha; *Oct–Dec 1944* Waffen-Standartenführer Harun el Raschid Bey; *Jan–May 1945* SS-Hauptsturmführer Fürst

Formed in November 1943 as the Ostmanische SS-Division, this was divided into units known as Waffen-Gruppen. Four distinct areas were represented within the formation: Turkestan, Azerbaijan, Crimea and Idel-Ural (Volga Tatars). These units were composed of volunteers from the traditionally Muslim communities of the southern and eastern USSR – particularly the Turkomen. These peoples had no reason to feel loyalty to the Communist regime, and many volunteered for service as soon as the German armies reached their regions. Although they were accepted into various local units attached to German formations, it was not until manpower shortages became critical that the SS considered drawing upon their potential.

In the course of its short life this force had no fewer than seven commanders, mostly relatively junior officers. It was one of the less impressive volunteer formations, suffering from indiscipline and low morale, and the units tended to be dispersed for security duties on the lines of communication rather than employed in the front line.

A BeVo-woven **cuffband** was produced bearing the title *'Osttürkischer Waffen-verband der SS'* in grey lettering on – uniquely – a traditional Muslim green rather than a black base; but there is as yet no evidence that this was actually issued and worn.

Legion Freies Indien/Indisches Freiwilligen Legion

Commanders

June 1942–Aug 1944 Oberstleutnant Kurt Krappe; *Aug 1944–May 1945* SS-Oberführer Heinz Bertling

Insignia of the Osttürkischer Waffen-verband der SS. (Left to right) Armshields, in machine-woven form, for troops from Azerbaijan, the Urals, and Turkestan. These were certainly manufactured and worn. (Below) The cuffband, machine-woven in silver-grey on green, was manufactured but is thought never to have been issued.

Subhas Chandra Bhose, an Indian nationalist politician who had been imprisoned by the British, made his way to Berlin early in 1941. His offer to raise a volunteer legion from Indian soldiers captured in North Africa was accepted; some 3,000 volunteers were eventually raised, and the Legion was officially formed in December 1942 as (Indisches) Infanterie Regiment 950, with one depot and three line battalions. It was not highly regarded, and was used for garrison duties south of Bordeaux in occupied France until August 1944, when it was withdrawn to Germany and transferred to the Waffen-SS. (The return trip took over two months, and the unit came under repeated attack by French partisans while in transit.) From November 1944 until March 1945 the unit was stationed in Germany; as the war drew to a close the Legion attempted to reach Switzerland, but was captured by Free French and US troops. Handed over to the British, the personnel were shipped back to India and imprisoned. Due to the delicate political climate as Indian independence was negotiated, these men – like those of the Japanese-sponsored 'Indian National Army' also raised by Bhose – were treated leniently.

In 1942–44 the unit wore German Army tropical uniform (with turbans for Sikh personnel) and all conventional insignia. A right sleeve **armshield** bore a natural-coloured leaping tiger motif superimposed on horizontal stripes of saffron/white/green, all below a white panel with 'FREIES INDIEN' in black lettering; this was presumably retained after transfer to the Waffen-SS. A special right hand **collar patch** displaying a tiger's head was manufactured, and recently discovered photographs confirm that it was definitely worn to some extent. The Germans permitted the introduction of a whole range of decorations by the so-called Committee for Free India; these *Azad Hind* awards were manufactured by the Austrian firm of Rudolf Souval.

Although the vast majority of known photographs of the *Legion Freies Indien* show them wearing German Army tropical uniform with Army insignia, it is reported that a small number of photographs have recently emerged which confirm that SS uniform and insignia were also issued and worn to some extent, including the tiger's head collar patch. The right armshield worn on Army uniform was also retained on SS tunics.

The Cossacks

Germany had taken full advantage of the hatred of the Moscow regime felt among many of the historically independent Cossack communities. As early as August 1941 the first entire Cossack regiment of the Red Army came over to the Wehrmacht, and others followed, being attached to German units on an *ad hoc* basis and usually employed for anti-partisan and line of communications security duties. In spring 1943 the German Gen von Pannwitz assembled a Cossack division, based (with many of their families) at Mielau in Poland. Deployed to Yugoslavia in September 1943, this was later split into two divisions forming XIV Cossack Corps. A mixture of traditional and German Army clothing was worn, with mixed insignia, and armshields identifying the traditional Hosts. At the beginning of 1945 the entire Cossack force was transferred to the Waffen-SS as XV SS-Kosaken Kavallerie Korps, but this was a purely administrative change and the troops continued to wear their old uniforms and insignia. (For further details see MAA 147, *Foreign Volunteers of the Wehrmacht 1941–45*, & MAA 361, *Axis Cavalry in World War II*.)

THE PLATES

A: VOLKSDEUTSCHE & RUSSIAN DIVISIONS

A1: Waffen-Sturmmann, 24. Waffen Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Division der SS; Austro-Yugoslav border, autumn 1944

This junior NCO, hunting partisans in the mountains, wears the M1942 helmet, basic field-grey M1943 uniform, mountain boots, standard canvas gaiters and rifleman's field equipment, and carries the Kar98k rifle. The most interesting item is the mountain anorak, field-made from cotton duck Waffen-SS reversible camouflage-printed material spring/summer side outwards. This was not general issue, but a rare and desirable garment made up at unit level in imitation of the Army's mountain anorak (reversible from white to drab grey-brown or field grey), which was also used in small numbers by Waffen-SS Gebirgsjäger.

A2: Grenadier, 30. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS; Rhine front, winter 1944

Nothing identifies this infantry private as a Russian volunteer but just visible under his greatcoat are the plain black tunic collar patches worn by many foreign SS privates. His M1943 'universal' field cap and uniform, and rifleman's field equipment, are standard issue. The greatcoat is the M1942 with deep, enlarged collar. As well as his Kar98k and M1939 'egg' grenade he carries the Panzerfaust 60 anti-tank weapon, issued in large numbers in the last months of the war.

A3: Waffen-Obersturmführer, Waffen Artillerie Regiment der SS 25; Neuhammer, spring 1945

This Hungarian first lieutenant serving with the artillery unit of the 25. W Gren Div der SS *Hunyadi* at the Neuhammer training grounds wears typical officer's field dress, the service cap suggesting that he is not in the firing line. The Army-style M1936 tunic with dark green collar facing was still seen late in the war, but is worn here with rankers' issue M1943 trousers, gaiters and ankle boots. On his right collar is the distinctive 'H' patch of this division, edged – like the rank patch – with officers' aluminium thread cord; his shoulder straps of rank have the red-over-black double underlay of SS artillery. The use of a Hungarian national armshield cannot be confirmed from photographic evidence. His Army officer's field belt supports a P38 semi-automatic in a soft-shell holster, and he holds 10x50 binoculars.

B: BELGIAN DIVISIONS

B1: SS-Unterscharführer, 28. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division *Wallonien*; Pomerania, spring 1945

This infantry NCO, a veteran of the German Army's Walloon volunteer regiment, wears the M1943 field cap, M1942 field blouse, M1943 trousers, and old 'dice shaker' marching boots. He has retained on his Waffen-SS jacket the Army-type Walloon armshield and Edelweiss right sleeve patch, and on his cap the Army mountain troops' metal Edelweiss badge. On his left breast he wears the buttonhole ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class, the Infantry Assault Badge, and the honour badge of the Belgian 'Rexist' party which provided many of the unit's early volunteers. His most recently issued items are the revolutionary Sturmgewehr 44 ('MP44'), and one set of triple pouches for its magazines – these were in short supply, like so much else by this date.

SS-Sturmbannführer Degrelle addresses members of the Sturmbrigade *Wallonien* during a parade in Charleroi in April 1944. Note that an Army mountain troops' metal Edelweiss badge is pinned to the side of Degrelle's field cap, with – unusually – the stem pointing towards the rear rather than the front. (Josef Charita)

B2: SS-Sturmann, Panzerjäger Kompanie, 28. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division *Wallonien*; Pomerania, spring 1945

The field-grey Panzer-cut vehicle uniform issued to Waffen-SS armoured assault gun crews in 1941 was later extended to Panzerjäger and armoured Nebelwerfer crews, and to some crews of towed anti-tank guns, like this 75mm Pak 40 gunner. He in fact wears the jacket of the vehicle uniform with standard issue M1943 trousers – a mismatch typical of this late date. The use of SS-rune collar patches by this 'non-Germanic' unit was a contradiction of normal policy, but the formation's commander Léon Degrelle was one of Hitler's particular favourites. The gunner wears the 'Wallonien' cuffband; the Army mountain troops' Edelweiss right sleeve patch acquired before the unit passed into the Waffen-SS, but not, in this case, a national armshield. The M1942 woollen sweater was popular in the second half of the war.

B3: SS-Schütze, 27. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division *Langemarck*; Altdamm bridgehead, March 1945

This Flemish infantryman on the Oder front wears several distinctive insignia on his M1943 field blouse. On his right collar is the 'Trifos' three-legged sunwheel swastika; on his left sleeve, the German-made version of the national armshield with a black lion on a yellow ground, above the 'Langemarck' cuffband. Photographs show some divisional personnel issued with this type of 'Styrian' mountain gaiters – by this stage of the war men received whatever the stores could provide, and the old M1935 helmet was also reissued in large numbers. His Kar98k has the grenade-launcher attachments, and he carries a pair of grenade bags for its ammunition; its tools pouch is slung behind his right hip.

Freshly decorated Walloon volunteers on parade; note the soldiers in the second and third ranks with Iron Crosses and War Merit Crosses worn from ribbons through their buttonholes – awards were only worn in this fashion on the day of presentation. In the second rank, far left, an Eastern Front Winter 1941/42 Medal is worn hanging from its ribbon pinned to the left breast pocket; no award would ever be worn in this fashion by German personnel, but it was a time-honoured practice under the Belgian, French and Spanish military traditions. (Josef Charita)

C: EASTERN FRONT, 1945

C1: SS-Hauptscharführer, 31. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division; Austria, March 1945

This German sergeant-major is probably one of the cadre from the aborted 23. Div *Kama* who were transferred to provide some stiffening for the Hungarian Volksdeutsche conscripts of the half-trained 31. Division. Although weapons of all kinds were in short supply, the relative scale of issue of the StG44 was generous in 'Type 45' divisions such as this. This NCO displays his tunic collar folded over the collarless neck of one of several different patterns of sheepskin winter overjacket; he has also acquired late-manufacture padded winter reversible trousers in so-called 'pea' pattern camouflage.

C2: SS-Untersturmführer, SS- und Polizei Fusilier Abteilung 35; Niesse front, April 1945

This second lieutenant, leading a platoon in the fusilier (infantry reconnaissance) battalion of the 35. Div, betrays the mixed origins of a patchily equipped 'last ditch' division raised mainly from Police personnel. His M1935 helmet still has the Police national decal. The Army's M1942 field-grey/white reversible winter oversuit was superseded in the Waffen-SS by their own camouflage/white version from late 1943, but the grey type was issued to second line units including Police. The old MP28/II sub-machine gun was also seen in large numbers in Police units, which had low priority for the MP40. About the best thing this officer has managed to lay hands on is a pair of felt and leather winter boots. His light equipment, including the MP28 magazine pouch, is attached to the SS officer's belt with circular clasp buckle.

C3: SS-Scharführer, schwere SS-Panzer Abteilung 502; Oder front, March 1945

Under his reversible camouflage tank crew overall (autumn side showing) this NCO wears a grey sweater, and the Waffen-SS black Panzer crew vehicle uniform, with the black version of the M1943 field cap; this has separate insignia, the eagle worn on the left side. The one-piece camouflage-printed overall introduced in January 1943 was not in production long, but was popular; although officially replaced by the two-piece, non-reversible, 'pea' pattern Panzer-cut suit early in 1944, it was used until the end of the war by those who could hang on to it. This 'King Tiger' tank commander – perhaps one of the few veterans of Kursk to survive this long – has added his uniform shoulder straps, though against regulations, this was commonly seen.

The three SS heavy tank units equipped with the PzKw VI Tiger I, and later the Tiger II (Königstiger), originated in a heavy company formed within each of the Panzer regiments of the 1. *Leibstandarte*, 2. *Das Reich* and 3. *Totenkopf* Divs in winter 1942/43. In early 1944 the remnants of these formed the nucleus of, respectively, Heavy SS Tank Battalions (sSS-PzAbt) 101, 102 & 103, which were detached from the divisions and employed as assets of I & II SS-Panzer Korps. After heavy losses in Normandy the three units were retitled sSS-PzAbt 501, 502 & 503 in autumn 1944, and completed re-equipment with the Tiger II ausf B Königstiger before being sent to the Eastern Front. This battalion was finally destroyed in the Halbe Pocket in late April 1945.

D: ITALIAN VOLUNTEERS

D1: Waffen-Sturmbannführer, Legione SS Italiana, January 1944

This major wears a Waffen-SS officer's service cap, but with the SS eagle and swastika replaced by an eagle gripping the Italian *fasces*. The rest of his uniform is standard Italian Army of the 1940 regulations, but with SS-pattern shoulder straps of rank, and 'mirrored' collar rank patches on red backing – as is the eagle-and-fasces left sleeve badge. His breast badge and medal ribbons identify him as a veteran of the Italian contingent on the Russian Front in 1941–42.

The BeVo-weave version of the 'SS-Kriegsberichter' cuffband; and the later cuffband for the *Kurt Eggers* war correspondents regiment, in similar but not identical machine-woven format.

This unit grew from a company to a full regiment, its dispersed companies serving with corps, and platoons with individual divisions (see also MAA 404, under Plate F3), personnel wore signals branch lemon-yellow Waffenfarbe piping. Cuffbands are known with the titles 'SS-Kriegsberichter Kp.', 'SS-KB-Abtl.', 'SS-Kriegsberichter', and finally 'Kurt Eggers', following the award of the regimental honour title commemorating the death in action of that former editor of the SS periodical *Das Schwarze Korps*. The unit was commanded by SS-Standartenführer Gunther D'Alquen, a subsequent editor.

D2: Schutze, 1. Italienische Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade; Nettuno front, April 1944

This infantryman serves with the unit (in Italian, 1a Brigata d'Assalto, Milizia Armata, comprising the *Debica* and *Vendetta* battalions) whose courageous fighting in the Anzio campaign earned the Italian volunteers full integration into the Waffen-SS a few weeks later. He wears complete Italian Army clothing and equipment: the M1933 helmet, M1940 continental uniform, M1929 camouflaged tent section worn as a poncho, M1891 bandolier, M1935 gasmask bag, M1939 dagger and M1891/1938 Carcano carbine. The only identifying feature is the Italian eagle-and-fasces sleeve badge worked on red backing. If they were visible his collar patches would be red, probably blank on both sides.

D3: Waffen-Scharfuhrer, 29. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (italienische Nr.1); northern Italy, April 1945

By this date the Italian partisan bands were strong, well-armed and bold, and their attacks tied down both German and RSI troops in large numbers. This NCO displays the SS decal on his Italian helmet. The M1941 Italian paratroop uniform – a collarless jacket with a 'Sahariana' chest design and baggy trousers – was popular in the SS division, as throughout the RSI forces, but by no means universal: group photographs show great variety. The addition of German NCO collar *Tresse* presented problems, and photos show several different configurations, both long and abbreviated. The most usual collar patches were plain black on the right with rank on the left; shoulder straps were standard W-SS issue; but the Italian SS sleeve eagle was retained, on black backing. He has a Beretta M1938a sub-machine gun with triple magazine pouches, and a holstered Beretta M1934 pistol on his RSI belt; the Italian Army 'tactical bag' is slung behind his left hip.

E: ANTI-PARTISAN UNITS

E1: SS-Rottenfuhrer, SS Sonderregiment Dirlewanger; Belorussia, June 1944

This infamous German penal unit was identified by the collar patch of crossed rifles over a grenade. There is nothing else remarkable about this corporal; he wears an M1940 field cap, M1942 field blouse open over an M1942 grey attached-collar shirt, M1943 trousers, canvas gaiters and ankle boots. His rifleman's equipment is supported by M1939 infantry 'Y'-straps, and he has an M1924 'stick' grenade thrust into his belt.

E2: Waffen-Hauptsturmführer, SS-Sturmbrigade RONA; Warsaw, August 1944

Kaminski's officers wore a mixture of German and Russian items during the unit's four-month existence as part of the Waffen-SS. It is highly unlikely that any acquired SS uniforms or insignia. This captain wears a German Army officer's service cap with red piping, but not because he is an artilleryman – apparently red-piped Soviet and German caps were both favoured by RONA officers. The only insignia is an oval cockade in the old Russian national colours of white/blue/red. His German Army rankers' blouse, with the collar opened, bears Osttruppen junior officer's collar patches in black and silver, and the RONA armshield; photos show that by August 1944 officers were wearing German shoulder straps. His belt, breeches and boots are Russian.

An SS-Unterscharfuhrer war correspondent sporting the 'SS-Kriegsberichter' cuffband, and presumably attached to the *Langemarck*. Note the position of the Flemish national armshield on the forearm, and its rather sharper outline than that shown on page 10. (Josef Charita)

E3: Schutze, SS-Sturmbrigade RONA; Warsaw, August 1944

RONA; Warsaw, August 1944

This Russian renegade serving with the notorious Kaminski Brigade wears a mixture of German and Russian items. His M1943 field cap still has the Army insignia. His Army six-button M1943 field blouse is worn with old straight-leg M1940 trousers and ankle boots. The RONA armshield was widely seen; some men also wore the German system of black and white collar patches for Osttruppen, as here, but others wore none. The Tsarist-style shoulder straps originally issued to Russian volunteers were officially replaced in spring 1944 by German straps, but photos show that in August many RONA troops had none. Most of RONA's weapons were captured Soviet types: this light machine gunner has the Degtyarev DP28 with its magazine bag slung, and a holstered pistol.

F: DUTCH & FRENCH VOLUNTEERS

F1: SS-Oberscharfuhrer, SS-Pionier Kompanie 33; Berlin, April 1945

This veteran senior NCO of the 33 *Charlemagne* Division's assault engineer company wears a second pattern camouflage cover on his M1942 helmet; the M1942 sweater, and the M1944 drab brownish-grey field uniform of waist-length blouse and matching trousers. His insignia are standard Waffen-SS pattern, including the second pattern national armshield; the 'Charlemagne' cuffband is known to have been worn (probably exclusively) by battle-proven members of this specific company. The decoration for single-handed destruction of a tank with hand-held

An SS military police NCO guarding Allied prisoners captured in Normandy. Note the distinctive gorget plate worn on a flat-link chain around the neck, and the 'SS-Feldgendarmerie' cuffband. Initially these were men drafted in from the civil police services, but as the Waffen-SS expanded those without prior police experience were also accepted. Assigned at corps and divisional level in the field, their tasks were no different from those of their Army counterparts, except that the SS-Feldgendarmerie were not employed on the home front – within Germany, military policing was carried out by the Wehrmacht. (Josef Charita)

weapons is worn on his right sleeve. He carries the StG44, and has a complete set of six pouches for it, supported by the canvas webbing 'Y'-straps often issued late in the war.

F2: Grenadier, 33. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS *Charlemagne*; Pomerania, February 1945

Nothing in his appearance identifies this rifleman as a French volunteer. He wears the M1944 winter outer suit of a fur- or fleece-lined hooded parka and padded overtrousers, with a woollen toque and camouflaged padded mittens with separate trigger-finger. The non-reversible parka differed from the M1942 Waffen-SS pattern (see MAA 401, Plate H2) in having a fully buttoned front rather than the less convenient half-buttoned pullover design; simpler unpleated chest pockets; and some examples were of a darker graphite-grey. A variant was also made up in Italian Army camouflage material. The grenade in his belt is the M1943 type.

F3: SS-Unterscharführer, Landstorm Nederland; Holland, autumn 1944

The M1943 uniform is unremarkable, except for the flaming grenade badge used both on the cap band and on the right collar patch, and the 'Landstorm Nederland' cuffband of this territorial defence organization. This senior NCO is armed with an MP40; one set of magazine pouches and a map/despatch case on his belt are supported by M1941 'Y'-straps.

G: CAMOUFLAGE CLOTHING, 1944–45

G1: SS-Schütze, 38. SS-Grenadier Division *Nibelungen*; Upper Bavaria, May 1945

There was little uniformity in the appearance of Waffen-SS units in spring 1945. Even where camouflage clothing was available in store, it often went unissued in the chaotic final weeks, and many SS troops fought their last battles in field-grey or in their camouflaged padded winter jackets. This young rifleman wears a Waffen-SS M1931 Zeltbahn tent section folded as a poncho, summer side showing, over his M1944 field uniform. For lack of a cloth cover his helmet is roughly camouflaged with vehicle paints – a practice noted as early as June 1944 in Normandy. His main weapon is the powerful Panzerfaust 100 anti-tank projector.

G2: SS-Rottenführer, 32. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division *30 Januar*; '9th Army Pocket', April 1945

The two-piece non-reversible combat uniform in herring-bone twill material printed with the dotted so-called 'pea' camouflage pattern was introduced early in 1944, as an economy replacement for the reversible smocks made of waterproof cotton duck. Both types were in short supply, and the HBT suit was never produced in sufficient numbers. In September 1944 it was ordered that camouflage clothing was to be returned to stores when winter garments were issued, to be reissued in March 1945; but in many cases this was ignored. In the absence of winter items this corporal has retained his HBT suit and wears it over his M1943 woollen uniform; he has broken another regulation by adding the SS sleeve eagle and his rank chevrons to the camouflage jacket. His weapon is the Walther-designed Gewehr 43 semi-automatic rifle, but he has managed to acquire only two of the canvas belt pouches for its ten-round detachable magazines.

G3: SS-Funker, SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade *Langemarck*; Zhitomir, Russia, January 1944

This signal company linesman wears the thin white outer parka shell and overtrousers that were intended to be worn in conjunction with the Waffen-SS M1942 (and later M1944) padded grey hooded parka uniforms. These shell garments were often seen worn over other types of winter clothing as snow camouflage. He also wears a double-button M1943 field cap over a woollen toque, late model padded winter trigger-finger mittens, and felt and leather winter boots. The tools of his trade are a slung M1933 field telephone, and a signalman's repair kit; he carries only a holstered P08 for self-defence.

H: 'NORDIC' VOLUNTEERS

H1: SS-Sturmmann, Finnisches Freiwilligen Bataillon der Waffen-SS, autumn 1941

The recruitment of Finnish volunteers for an SS-Freiwilligen Bataillon *Nordost* began in June 1941; given Finland's recent sufferings at Soviet hands it is unsurprising that about 1,000 men rapidly enlisted on two-year contracts. In September 1941 the title was simplified to 'Finnish Volunteer Battalion'. By February 1942 the unit was trained and ready, and was attached to the 5. Div *Wiking* as III Btl, SS-Inf Regt *Nordland*, under the command of SS-Ostubaf Hans Collani. They fought well; but by spring 1943, when their tour of duty was coming to an end, Stalingrad had fallen and Germany's interests no longer seemed identical to Finland's. Sent home on leave, the volunteers were persuaded by their own government not to re-enlist, and the unit was disbanded. This medical orderly, equipped with pouches for dressings and a larger, slung canteen, wears the national armshield, below the orderly's snake-

The silver-grey on black machine-woven cuffband of the SS-Feldgendarmerie. The grey on brown Army version, with the title 'Feldgendarmerie' machine-woven in Gothic script, was also very frequently worn by SS military police.

and-staff badge; a cuffband with the unit name has been described but is not confirmed by photographs.

H2: Legions-Unterscharführer, Freiwilligen Legion Norwegen, summer 1942

Recruiting for the SS Norwegian Volunteer Legion began in late June 1941, encouraged by the leader of the Nasjonal Samling (NS) party, Vidkun Quisling. By August the first volunteers for two-year contracts were training in Germany; many came from the Rijkshird, a uniformed movement equivalent to the German SA. Commanded by Legions-Stubaf A.Quist, the 1,200-strong unit arrived with the 2. SS-Inf Bde (mot.) on the Leningrad front in February 1942; it was later joined by two further companies, one raised from the Norwegian police, and transferred to the 1. SS-Inf Bde (mot.). In May 1943 the Legion returned to Norway, and was disbanded in September; but many survivors joined the Regt *Norge* of the new 11. Div *Nordland*.

It is reported that the Police component, led by Legions-Hstuf Jonas Lie, was styled as a Ski Company; and some legionaries were certainly photographed wearing this German *Bergmütze* cap. We have reconstructed the green Waffenfarbe of the mountain troops on this M1936 uniform; photographs confirm the rampant-lion-and-axe collar patch, and 'Legion Norwegen' cuffbands both with and without the prefix 'Frw.' in the title. A miniature Norwegian flag was worn below the sleeve eagle; but this cross-and-swords forearm badge of the Rijkshird was worn instead by former NS members in the Police company.

H3: SS-Rottenführer, Britisches Freikorps, 1944

Probably the smallest of all national contingents, the BFC was never more than about 30 strong. This tawdry little group were enlisted in British and Commonwealth military and merchant marine prison camps in January–October 1943, in return for alcohol, access to prostitutes and very limited freedom. Ill-disciplined, and in some cases of very low intelligence, they were more trouble than they were worth, and even their propaganda value was minimal. A section were trained as combat engineers; and a handful of men were briefly attached to the reconnaissance battalion of the 11. Div *Nordland* near Angermünde in March 1945. They were rejected (reportedly by the corps commander SS-Ogruf Felix Steiner, in person), and wandered pointlessly until they were captured or gave themselves up. Only one or possibly two British citizens did fight with *Nordland* in Berlin. The captured BFC survivors were tried, and served prison sentences suitable to their individual guilt.[11]

11 See Ronald Seth, *Jackals of the Reich* (New English Library, 1972); Bender & Taylor, *Uniforms, Organization & History of the Waffen-SS*, Vol.3 (Mountain View, California, 1972), pp.83–84; Littlejohn, *Foreign Legions of the Third Reich*, Vol.2 (San Jose, California, 1981)

Despite its tiny size, an effort was clearly made to provide this squalid gang with a full set of special insignia; original examples do not survive, but a few clear wartime photographs confirm their use. This corporal wears M1942 uniform with a single-button M1943 field cap. His right hand collar patch shows three left-facing heraldic 'lions' (leopards) *passant guardant*. A Union flag armshield is worn above a machine-embroidered cuffband bearing the Gothic-lettered English language title 'British Free Corps'. The BFC were issued P38 pistols, but no ammunition.

H4: SS-Hauptscharführer, Ersatzkompanie, Freikorps Danmark, autumn 1941

Many Danish volunteers had already joined the Regt *Nordland* of the 5. Div *Wiking* before, in June 1941, recruiting began for a Free Corps to fight in Russia. Denmark had strong right wing political parties, and many former soldiers came forward for two-year contracts. From August 1941 cadres from the Regt *Nordland* were transferred to help form a second battalion, including the Freikorps' commander from March 1942, SS-Stubaf Christian von Schalburg. A battalion went into action in May 1942 attached to 3. Div *Totenkopf* in the Demjansk Pocket, where Schalburg and many others fell. His replacement, SS-Staf von Lettow-Vorbeck from the Frw. Legion Flandern, was killed after only a week, and by August casualties had reached nearly 80 per cent. After a month's rest in Denmark the unit was back in Russia in October, some 1,800 strong. Led by SS-Ostubaf K.B.Martinsen, it fought on the northern sector until May 1943, when it was withdrawn and disbanded; many survivors transferred into the Regt *Danmark* of the 11. Div *Nordland*.

This warrant officer wears the enlisted ranks' service cap with strap and stiffening removed, and an M1941 field blouse altered to a more officer-like appearance with a shortened skirt and sewn-down patch pockets. He is identified as one of the *Wiking* Div veteran cadre by his Iron Cross ribbon and Infantry Assault Badge. Just below the 'Freikorps Danmark' cuffband are two *Tresse* cuff rings marking the appointment of company sergeant major '*der Spiess*'; and note the whistle cord. The SS-runes were the usual collar patch, but photographs confirm that this Danish flag motif was worn briefly, at least by this replacement training company.

Post-war copies of the collar patch and cuffband of the British Free Corps; no original examples are known to exist, but wartime paybook portraits and a few other photos confirm that these, and the Union flag armshield, were certainly manufactured and worn – see Plate H3. By this stage of the war it was unusual to see an SS cuffband in Gothic script, rather than the standard Latin lettering.

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